

The Moody Atlas of the Bible

Barry J. Beitzel



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To Carol, my closest and dearest friend,
my sure companion on the journey of faith
and on the journey to the sites.

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

1QapGen	<i>Genesis Apocryphon</i> from Qumran cave 1	LXX ^A	Codex Alexandrinus
1QM	<i>War of the Children of Light against the Children of Darkness</i> from Qumran cave 1	LXX ^B	Codex Vaticanus
3Q15	Copper Scroll from Qumran cave 3	LXX ^S	Codex Sinaiticus
4QEn ^d	<i>Enoch</i> fragment from Qumran cave 4	MT	Mas(s)oretic Text [the Hebrew text of the Old Testament]
4QSam	<i>Samuel</i> from Qumran cave 4	Mt./Mts.	Mountain, Mountains
Akk.	Akkadian	N./n.	Nahr [Hebrew word for river or stream]; or, when used with Africa: North
Ar.	Arabic	PN	personal name [male or female; ancient, classical, medieval or modern]
Aram.	Aramaic	R./r.	River
ARMT	Archives royales de Mari: transcriptions et traductions.	RN	royal name [male or female; a non-Israelite/Judahite monarch]
Br.	Brook	RNn	royal name [a king of Israel (the northern kingdom) during the divided monarchy]
ca.	<i>circa</i> [approximately]	RNs	royal name [a king of Judah (the southern kingdom) during the divided monarchy]
ch.	chapter(s)	SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
DN	divine name [male or female]	ss	superscription [heading found at the beginning of many Psalms]
EA	siglum for the Tell el-Amarna tablets	Sum.	Sumerian
Eg.	Egyptian	T.	Tel/Tell [Hebrew/Arabic word for artificial earthen occupational mound]
ELS	D. Baldi, ed., <i>Enchiridion Locorum Sanctorum. Documenta S. Evangelii Loca Respicientia.</i> Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1982.	Ug.	Ugaritic
EN	ethnic name	Vulg.	Vulgate
Gk.	Greek	W./w.	Wadi [Arabic word for intermittent water channel]
Heb.	Hebrew; or, in the context of a scriptural citation: <i>Hebrews</i>		
J.	Jebel [Arabic word for mountain]		
Kh.	Khirbet [Arabic word for ruins]		
L.	Lake		
Lat.	Latin		
LXX	A. Rahlfs, ed., <i>Septuaginta.</i> Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1962.		

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PREFACE

“Geography is a flavor.” Thus Starbucks proclaims as a banner on its sales displays around the world or on the side of a one pound bag of its coffee. The market strategy of the international conglomerate continues by affirming: You can tell a lot about a coffee if you know where it’s from, because every bean has a distinctive flavor particular to its land of origin. Coffees from Arabia are legendary for their berrylike flavors and winelike qualities. Those from Africa are remarkable for their floral aromas and citrusy tastes. Coffees from Latin America are celebrated for their great balance, medium body, tangy brightness, and consistent quality. And those from Asia-Pacific are popular for smooth, earthy, and exotic flavors, with low acidity and full body.

A similar claim can be made with respect to the biblical storyline: it exudes a distinctive flavor that is particular to the Land where it originated. Much of the biblical storyline’s character and aromatic quality reflect the specific geographic realities at the place of its birth and enactment. Thus for example, the Land of God’s covenantal promises might have been created with the aroma of an environment without blemish; it might have been permeated with the flavor of ecological or climatological perfection. It might have been endowed with the taste of a tropical rain forest through which coursed an effusion of crystal-clear waters; it might have been brought into existence with the texture and brightness of a thickly carpeted grassy meadow or the scent of an elegant garden suffused with the pungent fragrance of blossoms, mosses, and flowers. It might have been—but it was not. As I will attempt to demonstrate, this Land of promise that God prepared as the stage on which his storyline would be enacted is a locale that embodied the direst of geographic and environmental hardship. Innately possessing meager physical and economic resources, and positioned where it was caught inescapably in a maelstrom of relentless political upheaval, this Land has yielded up to its residents a simple, tenuous, mystifying, and precarious existence throughout the biblical epoch, even under the best of circumstances. It is an important and helpful insight to recognize that God prepared a *certain kind of land*, situated at a *particular location*, fashioned to elicit a *specific and appropriate response*. This is not to say that I believe the Bible was designed to teach the subject of geography, or any other of the sciences. It is merely to observe that the Bible often characteristically transmits its storyline through the geographic medium. To the degree one appreciates the flavor and parameters of the medium, so also one should be able to understand more fully the revelatory import and texture of a given biblical text.

The essence of geography has imbued the biblical storyline with a distinctive flavor. It is not the flavor of most of North America, Europe, or much of the rest of the world, but it is nonetheless a robust and full-bodied flavor, one that is a function of a peculiar geography. Capturing *this* flavor will depend to a large extent on one’s ability to recover and assess the Bible’s particular geographical horizon. St. Jerome, who lived in this Land for many years, wrote concerning geography’s role in the enterprise of biblical interpretation: “Just as those who have seen Athens understand Greek history better, and just as those who have sailed from Troy . . . to Sicily, and from there to Ostia Tiberias [Rome’s port on the Tyrrhenian Sea, fully developed in the 2nd century A.D. by the emperor Hadrian; **see map 26**] understand better the 3rd Book of (the poet) Virgil, so one who has seen the land of Judah with his own eyes or has become personally acquainted with the historical references to the ancient towns . . . will surely comprehend the Holy Scriptures with a much clearer understanding.”¹ Geography *does* play a critical role and *does* make a decisive difference, whether one has in mind the particular scent of a coffee bean or the distinctive flavor of a biblical storyline!

Geography is understood in the *Atlas* to define three separate, if somewhat overlapping concepts: physical geography (a description of those topographic and environmental features that characterize and embody the land), regional geography (a description of those political and territorial subdivisions that comprise the land), and historical geography (a diachronic unfolding of those events that have transpired in the land, which are conducive to a geographical explanation). Chapter one of the *Atlas* addresses aspects of physical geography, as well as setting forth many of the major parameters of regional geography; chapter two seeks to present an overview of historical geography. It is not my purpose in chapter two to supply a full and running commentary on the whole of the biblical narratives discussed, which would require separate volumes in themselves, but only to provide a geographic sketch sufficient to elucidate a given map. To a certain degree, chapter two adheres to the aphorism of Thomas Fuller: “. . . the eye will learn more in an hour from a Mappe, than the eare can learn in a day from discourse.”²

Anyone today who wishes to write on the biblical world faces the vexed question of nomenclature, but this issue is perhaps most acute and protracted for the geographer. Given the climate of contemporary Middle Eastern politics, it becomes almost impossible for the Bible geographer to employ certain words—*e.g.*, Israel/Palestine, Jordan/Transjordan, West

Bank/Samaria-Judea, Gulf of Aqaba/Gulf of Elat, Persian Gulf/Arabian Gulf, or even Armenia or Syria, *etc.*—without creating the impression that a certain political statement is being made or a particular nationalist or religious ideology is being endorsed.³ With this reality in mind, I wish at the outset to state as candidly and clearly as I know how to my readers—be they Christian, Jewish, or Muslim—that my agenda is purely historical and that when I use these or other such terms, even in a post-biblical or a modern context, their use should not be construed as espousing any particular contemporary political or ecclesial conviction.

Another problem faced by any author of an Atlas is the tension between the area covered by a map and the scale at which it can be covered. If the area to be covered is large, then the scale must be small, or else the map will not fit on the size of a printed page. But this can make for an extremely vague and imprecise map. Alternatively, if the map were to be composed at a large scale, then the area covered must be small, or again the map will be larger than page size. Now the map can be extraordinarily detailed but may lack the larger perspective or be without fixed geographic points. My effort here has been to keep the scale as large as possible and yet to avoid cropping off an important section of a map or placing an arrow that points off the map toward a designated spot. On a few occasions, however, to have an arrow pointing seemingly to the margin of a page was unavoidable, though admittedly this can be an irritating practice. Of similar practices, Plutarch once complained: “Geographers . . . crowd onto the edges of their maps parts of the world which elude their knowledge, adding notes in the margin to the effect that beyond this lies nothing but sandy deserts without water and full of wild beasts, unapproachable bogs, or frozen sea.”⁴ I trust that my readers will be more understanding. But my approach to this problem of area covered versus scale has sometimes necessitated that a map legend be positioned adjacent to, but not on, the map itself.

Complexities of phonetics between several writing systems used in the biblical world are profound, and a certain amount of inconsistency in the spelling of proper names is unavoidable. Nevertheless, a measure of systemization has been attempted. Names that have a well-known English form have been retained in the *Atlas* (e.g., Jerusalem, Babylon, Greece); names that are generally transliterated into English in a certain form retain that customary form here (e.g., Akkad, Tyre, Aleppo, Carchemish), even though the transliteration may be slightly imprecise; names not occurring in English are rendered phonetically in English script (e.g., Negeb, Wadi Far`ah, Kafr Bir`im), normally without vowel length marks or diacritical indicators (note that both length marks and diacritical signs *are* used where feasible when transcribing words that are not proper names). Arabic names may be spelled with or without the definite article (*el-* or *al-*, but often assimilated into the sound of the following consonant) (e.g., Tell el-Amarna, not Tell Amarna, or Jebel Magharah, not

Jebel el-Magharah). Finally, frequently cited bodies of water that serve as important geographical points of reference on a map have been assigned a static spelling throughout the volume (e.g., Mediterranean Sea, not also Upper Sea, Great Sea, Western Sea, Great Syrian Sea, Great Green Sea, Mare Internum, Mare Nostrum, Sea of the Maiden, Sea of Isis, or *tāmtu elitu*; Dead Sea, not also Salt Sea, Sea of the Arabah, Mare Maledictum, *al-bahaire el-maita*, Devil’s Sea, Stinking Sea), even though such spellings will admittedly be anachronistic on some maps. In a similar vein, historical periodization indicated by terms such as “(Late) Bronze Age” or “(Early) Iron Age” reflects a classification of architectural forms and/or decorative styles of ancient pottery. It has nothing to do with metalworking or any other form of metallurgic technology.

Beyond those common abbreviations found in the Table of Abbreviations, individual maps show abbreviations, symbols, and explanatory boxes in the legend and sometimes on the body of the map itself. Use of the question mark, traditionally employed on Bible maps to denote cities of uncertain location, has been avoided in the *Atlas* because of irritation or even possible confusion to the reader. By this, however, I do not wish to imply certainty where the identity of a site remains in doubt. Instead of a question mark, I have uniformly used the symbol [o] for a city whose location is judged to be uncertain; it was thought that this symbol is both less conspicuous on a map and less susceptible to misinterpretation.

Among the back matter, the reader will encounter three Indexes (Map Citation Index, Scripture Citation Index, General Index). The Map Citation Index is organized according to map number, not page number (for a complete list of maps arranged according to page number, refer to the Table of Maps and Figures found among the front matter). It should be stressed that the Map Citation Index is not a Gazetteer (a comprehensive index of all geographic names referenced in the Bible, sometimes including information concerning the pronunciation of each entry, together with a description of its present location and name); inasmuch as Gazetteers already exist in a variety of readily accessible versions and formats, there seemed to be no need to reinvent the wheel. The Scripture Citation Index is arranged according to page number in the *Atlas*; it is also keyed to English versification, which is sometimes at variance with the versification of the MT. The General Index intends to include many proper names and major subjects addressed in the text, with some limitations. Thus for example, frequently-cited biblical characters (e.g., Abraham, David, Jesus) are not included in the Index, since there are whole blocks of maps/text dedicated to these individuals (in such cases, refer to the Table of Maps and Figures found among the front matter). Likewise, frequently referenced classical writers (e.g., Josephus, Pliny) are not included in the Index, as the relevant source data are documented in the Notes. Also, I have deliberately limited

the number of geographical names in the General Index, hoping to minimize overlap with corresponding information contained comprehensively in the Map Citation Index. Names of most foreign monarchs have been subsumed in the General Index under their national identity (e.g., Assyrian monarchs, Persian monarchs, Roman emperors), but all other data have been arranged alphabetically.

Finally, this *Atlas* could never have become a reality without the diligent labor of a host of individuals, and my thanks to them here is more than a mere accommodation to tradition. These include Greg Thornton, Vice President at Moody Publishers; Dave DeWit, project co-ordinator at Moody Publishers; Tim Dowley, London, Project Editor; Nick Rowland, Cambridge, England, cartographer; and Nick Jones, co-edition coordinator, at Lion Hudson, Oxford, England. All maps are new and digitized. The text has been completely rewritten and greatly expanded, with ample supporting documentation provided.

I wish to communicate thankfulness to the Board of Regents of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, whose mission-minded sabbatical program has substantially helped to undergird and sustain a project of this breadth and scope. I also express profound indebtedness to my Teaching Assistant, Mr. A. D. Riddle, who has invested countless hours and concentrated energies in checking my work and in preparing the Indexes. And to Professors Davis Young, Walter Kaiser, James Hoffmeier, and Douglas Moo, who read parts of the manuscript and offered helpful insight and counsel, I express sincere appreciation. Naturally, any remaining errors are my

responsibility alone. Finally, I shall never be able to estimate fairly, much less to repay, the debt of gratitude that I owe my wife and family. Without their joyful sacrifices of time, and their steadfast patience and encouragement since its inception, this project could never have been brought to consummation.

For myself, the study of geography culminates in doxology. I confess to resonating with the prophetic declaration: “That which fills the whole earth is his glory” (Isa. 6:3b), or with the analogous refrain found on the lips of the psalmist:

“Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the Lord is a great God
and a great King above all gods.
The depths of the earth are in his hand;
the mountain peaks also belong to him.
The sea is his, for he made it;
and his hands formed the dry land.
Come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
the sheep under his care” (Ps. 95:2–7a).

BAALBEK, LEBANON

MAY, 2009

ENDNOTES

- 1 St. Jerome, “Praefatio Hieronymi in librum Paralipomenon juxta uox Interpretis,” in J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus: omnium SS. patrum, doctorum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum*, Patrologiae Latinae 29, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1880), 423a, author’s translation.
- 2 Thomas Fuller, *A Pisgah-sight of Palestine and The Confines thereof, with the Historie of the old and new Testament acted thereon*, (London: J. Williams, 1650), 3.

- 3 e.g., the *National Geographic Atlas of the World* [8th edition] was widely accused of displaying political bias by using the name “Persian Gulf,” with the words “Arabian Gulf” appearing in brackets beneath. A delicate geographical issue not limited to the Middle East, *Rand McNally’s World Atlas* [7th edition] experienced significant fallout from its primary use of “Peking” [and not “Beijing”].
- 4 Plutarch, *Lives: Theseus* 1.1, author’s translation.

CHAPTER 1

The Physical Geography of the Land



ROLE OF GEOGRAPHY IN UNDERSTANDING HISTORY

Western civilization has commonly embraced the logic of Greek philosophical categories and has endeavored to describe cosmic realities in terms of “time and space.” Individuals, ideas, movements, and even the courses of nations are often interpreted precisely in accordance with these canons. Hence, designations are invariably employed in analyzing civilizations past and present: pre-/post-, Early/Late, B.C./A.D., East/West, Oriental/Occidental, Near East/Far East/Middle East.¹ (Note the first word in this paragraph!)

Christian theology itself has not escaped such an encompassing mode of thinking: God may be described in terms that are corollary to time (*infinity, eternity*) or space (*omnipresence*). And Christianity asserts that those attributes of deity were willingly relinquished by Christ through the drama of incarnation, when he became “locked in time and space.” Accordingly, even upon superficial reflection, one can begin to comprehend something of the far-reaching significance of the temporal and spatial disciplines: history and geography respectively.

Moreover, history is in many respects inseparably bound by and subject to geographic limitations. Geography is an impelling force that both initiates and limits the nature and extent of political history, what we might call geopolitics. Geologic formation and rock type have a decisive effect on altitude, manner and extent of erosion, location and quantity of water supply, and physical topography. These, in turn, have a profound bearing on certain aspects of climate, raw materials, soil formation, and land use—factors that may alternatively repel or attract human settlement and certainly influence the location, density, and socioeconomic makeup of a settlement. Where settlements are founded, roadways are eventually opened and used by migrants, traders, or armies, and culture ultimately arrives at a particular location. Stated more succinctly, “With every step back in time, history becomes more and more geographical until, in the beginning, it is all geography.”²

In short, factors of geography often dictate where and how geopolitics will occur. Surely it is geographically significant that ancient civilizations emerged on the banks of rivers. Ancient Egypt owed its existence to the Nile; Mesopotamia drew its life sustenance from the Tigris and Euphrates; the Indus Valley civilization was situated along the river by the same name; the Hittite Empire rested astride the Halys; Old Indian culture sprang to life in the Brahmaputra and Ganges river valleys; ancient China had its Yellow River and the Yangtze; and European culture emerged on the banks of the Tiber, Thames, Danube, Rhine, and Seine. Nor is it

inconsequential that the Roman Empire was able to expand as far as the Danube and Rhine rivers, a boundary which for part of the 20th century also corresponded to the Iron Curtain. Even in 21st-century America, virtually every major commercial and industrial city has an outlet to river, ocean, or the Great Lakes network. Those few exceptions are located at the hub of important interstate highways or airline routes.

Other factors of geography, such as earthquake activity and volcanic eruption, have likewise played their part in fashioning history.³ It is axiomatic that the face of much of western Asia and eastern Africa has been formed through seismic activity. A huge fissure in the earth's surface has been the single dominant factor in shaping the landscape of western Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, and the island of Madagascar. **[See map 13.]**

In western Asia, earthquake activity has always meant that certain areas were inhospitable to human occupation, causing arterial travel to be funneled into an essentially north-south grid. The seismic forces that produced the mighty Himalayan chain, on the other hand, created what in antiquity was an impenetrable longitudinal barrier that caused culture to expand and traffic to flow on an essentially east-west axis. Vast badlands of congealed lava confront a potential settler in a dreary terrain broken only occasionally by basaltic plugs or cinder cones, gaunt reminders of bygone volcanic activity. More important is the harsh reality that this volcanic activity often rendered the soil totally unsuitable for human productivity. In antiquity it always presented a cruelly hostile environment that was intolerably painful to the limbs of pack animals, and thus precluded any sort of arterial traffic.

Volcanic eruptions can bring a segment of history to an abrupt termination. The image of Vesuvius's eruption upon Pompeii in A.D. 79 often comes to mind. The 1815 eruption of Tambora on Indonesia created a casualty count of approximately 92,000 and produced an ash cloud in the upper atmosphere that reflected sunlight back into space and produced a year without summer. The 1883 eruption of Krakatoa was audible across one-third of the earth's surface, caused a tsunami that was perceptible in all oceans of the world, adversely modified climate on a global scale for several years, and killed more than 36,000 people. Yet in vivid contrast to all these events stands the eruption of the Greek island of Santorini (Thera), located in the south Aegean Sea approximately midway between mainland Greece and Crete. **[See maps 111 and 112 for location.]**

Santorini's explosivity index at ground zero is calculated to have been more than 15 times greater than the force of the

atomic explosion over Hiroshima. In the wake of the colossal eruption that occurred on Santorini around 1525 B.C. (± 100 years, whether dated archaeologically or radiometrically), some 32 square miles of earth collapsed into a caldera of approximately 2,250 feet in depth. When the Aegean waters rushed into this newly created and superheated chasm (estimated to have been in excess of 2550° F.), a gigantic tsunami was formed that is estimated to have been as high as 800 feet at its apex. Within 20 minutes, this massive tidal wave—also propelling an enormous volume of searing, toxic gases—catastrophically struck Crete at an estimated speed of 200 miles per hour and at a height of 200 to 300 feet.⁴ Pumice laminated the vestige of Santorini with a volcanic deposit ranging in depth from between 65 and 195 feet. A cloud of pumice, ash, and lava estimated at between 8.5 and 11.25 cubic miles in volume was thrust some 50 miles into the sky where a predominantly northwesterly wind blew it toward Crete. The thick blanket of falling ash would have created an atmosphere of lethal air, producing polluted water, rancid food, and diverse diseases. What is more, basaltic cores the size of a person's head were hurled like missiles directly from Santorini to Crete. Waterborne pumice fragments manifesting a Santorini origin have been found across the entire stretch of the eastern Mediterranean basin, even at inland places as far away as Israel and Egypt.⁵ It is not difficult to comprehend how the entire Minoan culture on Santorini was brought to a disastrous, abrupt end, nor how a number of Minoan palaces on Crete were severely damaged and may even have been destroyed at that time.

Mountains, deserts, and oceans have all influenced the location or nature of geopolitics. Today's newspapers often contain lead stories having to do with the continental effects of El Niño, salination, widespread famine and food shortages, or global warming. Some of those same geographic factors played a profound role in ancient Near Eastern geopolitics. Famines were often described in ancient literature, and scholars have amply demonstrated how climate fluctuations in antiquity had an adverse effect on ancient culture.⁶

A "Mediterranean theater" of history existed from the demise of the Persian navy at the Battle of Salamis (480 B.C.) until the defeat of the Spanish Armada (A.D. 1588). Northern and southern shores regularly vied for political and cultural superiority. But after the oceanic voyages of Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and Ferdinand Magellan, the geopolitical sovereignty of the Mediterranean was challenged as the Renaissance and some of its important cities began to fade and "history" moved westward.

Natural resources represent yet another geographic factor that has influenced the location and nature of geopolitics. A wide array of ancient documentation explicitly addressed the need to maintain control over the tin of Afghanistan, the cedar of Lebanon, the silver of Assyria, the copper of Cyprus,

the gold of Spain, and the ivory of the African interior. And who can doubt that the whole complexion of modern geopolitics has been dramatically altered by the OPEC cartel? Indeed, geography represents the stage on which the pageant of history is presented, without which history itself would wander about aimlessly as a vagrant.⁷ To paraphrase the aphorism commonly but probably erroneously ascribed to Will Durant, civilization exists by geographic consent, subject to change without notice.⁸

Geography's effect upon history extends also to the theoretical domain. Like the effect of environment on culture, geography actually establishes the boundaries within which history must operate. Students of the effect of geography on history have made a most helpful distinction between its *determining* effect and its *limiting* effect. Where a frigid winter climate necessitates the wearing of heavy clothing, there is nothing in the temperature itself that decrees whether people shall wear sealskins or Shetland wool, *but they must procure and wear winter clothing*. When a region unsuitable for agriculture somehow becomes populated, very little in the environment predetermines which domestic animals shall be grazed or whether food shall be secured with hooks, nets, traps, or spears, *but a non-agrarian society will surely emerge*.

It is geographically pertinent that places in the Near East manifesting the most ancient human habitation—Mt. Carmel, Shanidar, Çatal Hüyük, Jarmo, Hacilar [map 23]—are situated precisely in areas that receive an average annual rainfall capable of sustaining the spontaneous generation of wild grains that can support human existence. It is also geographically pertinent that certain plants and animals are peculiar to only one hemisphere, or that writing arose where, when, and in the form that it did. These all represent expressions of geopolitical history that have been and continue to be subject to the limitations and indirect controls of geography.

Many of the same limitations are discernible even in our modern technological world, where deserts can be extensively irrigated or the effects of oppressive heat can be mitigated by air-conditioning; where Landsat photography equipped with infrared capability can discover vast reservoirs of fresh water buried deep in the cavities of the earth's interior, or cloud-seeding and widespread irrigation can lessen the gravity of an arid environment; where rampaging rivers can be restrained by huge dams and even harnessed for hydroelectric purposes; where formidable mountain barriers can be leveled, penetrated, or easily surmounted; and where air travel can put faraway places within quick and convenient reach. One might imagine how much more defined and deeply etched such geographical limitations would have been in a world that existed before such technological sophistication—one like the biblical world.

ROLE OF GEOGRAPHY IN UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE⁹

Matters of “time and space” remain among the difficulties that vex a 21st-century student of the Bible. The proclamations of Scripture were occasioned and penned from distinctive settings, yet modern students of the Bible live in a different millennium and adhere to a different worldview. Most live on a different continent. So in our desire to properly interpret and apply the Bible, we must ensure as much as possible that our enterprise is built knowledgeably upon the grid of the Bible’s own environment. At the outset, it is imperative for one to view geography (space) as something more than a superfluity that can be arbitrarily divorced from biblical interpretation. To the contrary, the biblical portrait of both Israel and the Church is painted on several levels, including the territorial level.¹⁰

In point of fact, biblical narratives are often driven by the notion of “space.” An incident may be said to have occurred on a certain hill, in a particular valley, on a discreet plain, at a given town. At times the name of the place itself becomes an important part of the revelation, frequently including a wordplay or pun on the name in order to reinforce the location of the event in public consciousness. Occasionally an aspect of geography becomes a theological axis around which an entire biblical book revolves, or a large portion of a book is particularly rich in geographical metaphor: for example, fertility and the book of Deuteronomy, forestation and the book of Isaiah, hydrology and the book of Psalms, or agriculture and the book of Joel. Often it is precisely a geographical reference or allusion that enables scholars to assign a book to a place of origin (such as Amos in Israel’s northern kingdom, or James in the eastern Mediterranean basin).

Perhaps even more profoundly, Jewish faith in the Old Testament was inextricably tied to space, and “land” became the prism of this faith. Land/space was an arena in which God acted mightily on behalf of his people. (Consider the call and covenant with Abraham and his descendants, the Exodus/Sinai motif, the conquest/settlement of the land, the captivity away from the land, the return to the land, the New Israel.) Many of God’s promises related directly to the original possession (or later restoration) of a particular parcel of real estate. It is not an overstatement to declare that, during its years of recorded biblical history, Israel’s rootage in this “land” provided its faithful their foundational identity, security, and even prosperity.

When they were not in possession of their land, Israelites were often described in terms that reflected the precarious connotations of landlessness, aimlessness, and estrangement:

- “Sojourning” (Gen. 12:10; 15:13; 47:4; Ex. 6:4; Deut. 10:19b; 26:5b; cf. Heb. 11:13)—A *sojourner* was a resident-alien who did not belong and could not settle down to enjoy the privileges afforded the citizen.

- “Wandering” (Num. 32:13; Hos. 9:17; Deut. 26:5b)—A *wanderer* was someone en route to nowhere. He was not just between stops, but actually had no specified destination or home.
- “Going into exile” (2 Kings 18:11; Isa. 5:13; 49:21; Ezek. 39:23; Ezra 1:11)—An *exile* was someone who had been forcibly uprooted or disenfranchised from his own land and obliged to live in another “place.”

Whether removed to Egypt, Babylon, or elsewhere, landlessness was tantamount to hopelessness. Israel’s covenantal faith was very much based on and grounded in events that transpired at certain places *in this world*. There was an acute consciousness of a national home, a definable geographic domain in which even the soil was divinely consecrated, what one may call “the holy land.”¹¹ One can rightly characterize Israel’s faith by its “here and now” essence—one where the ascetic principle of 1 John 2:15–17 was largely absent.

Similarly, in the New Testament gospels, much of the teaching of Jesus may be related to where he was situated at the time. Jesus talked about “living water” while at Jacob’s well (John 4:10); He called himself the “bread of life” while at Capernaum, where basaltic grain mills were manufactured (John 6:48); he declared Peter to be the “rock” against which “the gates of Hades will not prevail” while in Caesarea Philippi, a site otherwise known in the classical world for the Eleusian Oracles and the daughter of Demeter being carried off by Hades, god of the underworld (Matt. 16:18); and he spoke about faith that can move a mountain while on the road to Bethphage, from which his disciples could easily have looked southward and seen evidence of a mountain that had been physically “moved” by Herod the Great in order to construct his palace/fortress site of Herodium (Matt. 21:21–22).

In a few instances Jesus appeared to go out of his way in order to teach a lesson at a particular location. On one such occasion he told a parable about a certain nobleman who journeyed to a distant country in order to obtain royal power. However, his appointment was opposed by a delegation of local citizens, who had sent an embassy to state their objections to his reign. So, when he returned with his newfound authority, this nobleman ruthlessly attacked those who had opposed him and had been disloyal to him (Luke 19:11–27). This “parable” is eerily reminiscent of real-life events surrounding the eldest son of Herod the Great—Archelaus. After Herod’s death in 4 B.C., Archelaus traveled from Judea to Rome to obtain an “ethnarchy”—an official

sanction to rule over a province. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us Archelaus was awarded the title over the protest of more than 8,000 Jews in Rome, including a delegation that had also traveled from Judea.¹² After returning to Judea with his new power, Archelaus wasted no time in ruthlessly extracting vengeance on his detractors. Josephus also wrote that Archelaus focused much time and attention on the New Testament city of Jericho and its immediate environs: he rebuilt the Herodian palace at Jericho in splendid fashion, he built a town near Jericho that he named for himself, and he diverted irrigation waters to his date-palm plantations located only two miles from Jericho.¹³

It is of interest to note that Jesus told his parable as he was departing Jericho en route to Jerusalem, which means that his listeners would have been on the Roman road bordering the recently reconstructed Herodian palace and adjacent to the irrigation channels that carried water out of the Judean hill country to Jericho and its environs. Indeed, many of Jesus' teachings are arguably related to his distinctive geographical surroundings. He talked about various kinds of soil, the east wind, the flowers of the field, and branches abiding in vines. One later observes a geographical correlation between the uniquely centrifugal form of Jesus' Great Commission in Acts 1:8 ("[from] Jerusalem, [then] in all Judea and Samaria, and [finally] to the ends of the earth") and that book's presentation of the expansion of the early apostolic movement.

And for Christian faith as well—not only for Jewish faith—many crucially important aspects of biblical history have transpired in *very precise places on earth*—not just in empty space nor in heaven (e.g., the location of the birth, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ; the flow of the early apostolic missionary journeys; etc.). If the Christian gospel were simply a matter of otherworldliness or concerned only with spiritual or moral values, gaining an appreciation of the spatial dimension of the Bible would hardly matter, and seminal events in the New Testament would hardly have been geographically located in the text by the biblical writers. But it is neither of these! Central to the kerygma of the New Testament is the foundational claim that God became human at a definite moment in time and at a precise point in space. To be unaware of or to neglect the geographical DNA of the Bible or the biblical world will therefore often mean

that one may run afoul of the biblical argument or that reality may dissolve into sentimentalism.

Armed with a geographical knowledge of the Bible, one is better able to understand references such as "the former and latter rains," "the strong east wind," or "a land flowing with milk and honey." Similarly, one can better appreciate the scorching effect of Israel's hot sun; the implications of "no rainfall" and the importance of dew for crop survival; the prevalence of fertility (Baal) worship; the nature of Egyptian, Canaanite, and Mesopotamian deities; the migrations of Abraham, Moses, and Nehemiah; the terrain Joshua's forces could conquer but over which the Philistines could not run their chariots; the astounding success of David in eluding Saul's manhunt; the social psychology of the ministry of John the Baptist; the motivation(s) behind Jesus' astute move from Nazareth to Capernaum; and the staggering distances traveled by the apostle Paul. In addition, the pronouncements of the prophets make more sense as they predicted a stunning day to come when valleys will be lifted, mountains will be lowered, uneven and rough ground will be made level and smooth, and even when the water of the Dead Sea will become crystal clear and nourish abundant sea life.

Cultivating a spatial awareness is a necessary and valuable component in any serious study of the Bible. Like the Bible itself, faith is formulated from within the spatial and temporal context of which it was a part. Hence, the geographical discipline should become both the object and the vehicle of some of the most rewarding and enlightening Bible study; it is clearly worthy of a detailed investigation.

Old Testament Jericho sits adjacent to the most prolific spring in eastern Canaan (above site in picture). The scars of archaeological excavation are apparent on the tell.



A GEOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF PALESTINE

AS A COMPONENT OF THE FERTILE CRESCENT¹⁴

Wrapped like a mantle around the Mediterranean, Black, and Caspian seas is a vast geologic formation of elevated and rugged mountains, known as the Alpine-Himalayan chain. [See map 1.] This rocky and convoluted landscape stretches eastward from the Pyrenees Mountains of northern Spain in a nearly unbroken 7,000-mile line to the towering Himalayan chain of India and Nepal and the Tsinling Shan range of inland China. Near the center of this sprawling alpine uplift stand the lofty Taurus, Pontus, Urartu, and Kurdistan Mountains of Turkey (rising at places to an elevation of nearly 17,000 feet, with peaks snow-clad year round) and the Zagros and Elburz ranges of Iran (a few peaks of which ascend over 18,000 feet, the highest in all the Near East). Whether Akkadian, Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Phoenician, Persian, or Greek, ancient civilization was never fully able to transcend or penetrate such formidable terrain for imperialistic purposes. Indeed, all Near Eastern empires prior to the time of Julius Caesar were largely restrained by this northern barrier. Moreover, there always lurked in those dim and mountainous recesses fierce peoples who periodically threatened Semitic domination of the northern frontier.

Farther south, extending eastward from the Atlantic shores of North Africa, is an enormous expanse of almost waterless terrain. Known across that continent as the Sahara Desert, this barren and desolate environment stretches beyond the Red Sea and spans the entire Arabian Peninsula as the Arabian Desert. The arid zone crosses the mountains of Iran to the north side and continues through the Salt Desert (Dasht-e Kavir), Tarim Basin, and into the Gobi Desert of southern Mongolia. Broadening at places to more than 1,000 miles in width, and stretching nearly 5,000 miles across two continents, this band of savage, foreboding sand was yet another impassable barrier to imperialism and civilization in antiquity.

Hemmed in by these two natural barriers of mountain and desert lies a thin, semicircular strip of comparatively arable land that arches northward from the southeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea near Gaza (Acts 8:26) [map 2], through Israel, Lebanon, and western Syria. Near the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean, this strip bends eastward and then curves southeastward, essentially following the flood plains of the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys as far as the head of the Persian Gulf. Since the days of the Egyptologist James Breasted,¹⁵ this strip of land has been known as the "Fertile Crescent." In this Crescent, humankind invented the plow, the wheel, the lever and screw, and the arch. Here they learned how to domesticate

animals, to cultivate grains and become a food producer, to cluster buildings and build cities, to work metals, and to write (first pictographically and later alphabetically). It was in this crescent of civilization that humanity developed art, music, literature, law, mathematics, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, cartography, chemistry, and the calendar.

At the risk of oversimplification, the Fertile Crescent may be divided into two topographic spheres, known respectively as "Mesopotamia" and "Levant." The word "Mesopotamia" (a Greek term meaning "[the land] between the rivers"), was applied to the eastern sphere as early as the writings of Polybius, Strabo, and Josephus (200 B.C. to A.D. 100).¹⁶ Earlier still, the translators of the Septuagint (*LXX*) employed the word to designate the district from which the patriarch Abraham had emigrated (Gen. 24:10), rendered by Hebrew scribes as *Aram-naharaim* ("Aram of the two rivers"). It is likely that this Hebrew expression should be understood to demarcate only the land between the Euphrates and the Balih rivers, known also as *Paddan-aram* ("the field of Aram" [e.g., Gen. 28:2f; 33:18; 35:9]), and not the entire terrain between the Tigris and Euphrates. [See maps 2 and 30.] Nevertheless, contemporary references to "Mesopotamia" conventionally denote the "island" of land bounded on the west and south by the Euphrates, on the east by the Tigris, and on the north by the outliers of the Taurus and Kurdistan mountains. The low-lying plain of Mesopotamia lies at an altitude of about 1,625 feet in some northern sectors and slopes gently toward the Persian Gulf. [See map 2.]

Variations in precipitation differentiate Mesopotamia into a wet and dry steppe. The wet steppe receives more than twelve inches of rainfall annually. It is characterized by red-brown sediment, perennial grasses, herbs, and bushes, especially as one moves from west to east. This area between the Euphrates and the Balih rivers is most closely associated with the biblical patriarchs and consists of low, stony hills that are bare of vegetation except when watered in the spring. Between the Balih and the Habur rivers, the steppe is less arid and even relatively fertile in the springtime and early summer. The area is quite suitable for pasturage, yet survival in this part of the steppe depended on the numerous wells scattered throughout the terrain (Gen. 24:11; 29:2). The area does not seem to have been heavily occupied or cultivated in antiquity.

The upper Habur River appears on the map in the shape of an inverted triangle where the land flattens considerably. Adequate rainfall and good soil has allowed agriculture to flourish here since high antiquity, producing an abundance of the best grain in all of Mesopotamia. Flanking either side of

the southern point of this triangle, mountainous outcroppings retain the soil and mineral deposits washed down from the north. Accordingly, this region tends to remain grassy throughout even the summer and autumn months, so it provided lush grazing grounds for Mesopotamian shepherds who would migrate during the spring and summer from their native areas south of the Euphrates. The mountains also sustain essentially all the native timber available in Mesopotamia—pine, oak, terebinth, and pistachio trees. In modern times poplar trees have been planted throughout much of Mesopotamia, both as windbreaks and for architectural usage.

Most of the dry steppe, by way of contrast, is characterized by gray gypsum desert soils, shallow-rooted seasonal grasses, scattered shrubs, and—where the soil is deep enough—marginal dry-farming of winter crops. Below the eight-inch precipitation line, only limited-scale irrigation farming is practiced. The flood plain of the middle Euphrates, particularly in the area of Deir ez-Zor and south, is as deep as 300 feet and up to eight miles wide. The humus soil deposited there by the Euphrates and Habur is ideal for agriculture, and an entire network of settlements is known to have existed in this region throughout the biblical period. On a much more limited scale, the same conditions exist along a short section of the middle Tigris, in the area around Samarra, where the deposition of the Tigris and the Lower Zab has created a bed of rich alluvial sediments. The soil of south Mesopotamia is uniformly hard and nearly impenetrable. The landscape exhibits windblown

formations and dunes, a result of sand blowing off the Arabian Desert. At the same time, southern Mesopotamia has always had to contend with the problem of a higher water table brought on by over-irrigation, thus producing an ever-increasing soil salination. Some authorities, in fact, suggest that the decline of the Sumerian civilization there, and the subsequent shift northward of the cultural centers, can be attributed to the creeping salination of the soil.¹⁷ This is far from certain, though we do know that the Sumerian economy depended heavily on locally grown grain yields, far beyond what could be produced later in antiquity or any time since.¹⁸

The region between the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates and the Persian Gulf is known as the Shatt el-Arab waterway. Twice daily the water level in this vicinity rises and falls by about six feet, a cause of periodic boundary disputes between Iraq and Iran. Geographically speaking, the fluctuation permits salt water from the Gulf to penetrate inland, thereby creating a marshy area that severely restricts human settlement.

This general overview enables one to realize that the phrase “Fertile Crescent” is quite open to misinterpretation. More accurately, most of Mesopotamia can be called “fertile” only by way of contrast with its arid, desert neighbor, and only along

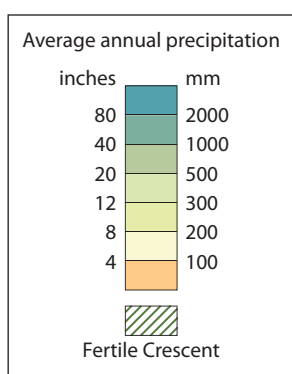
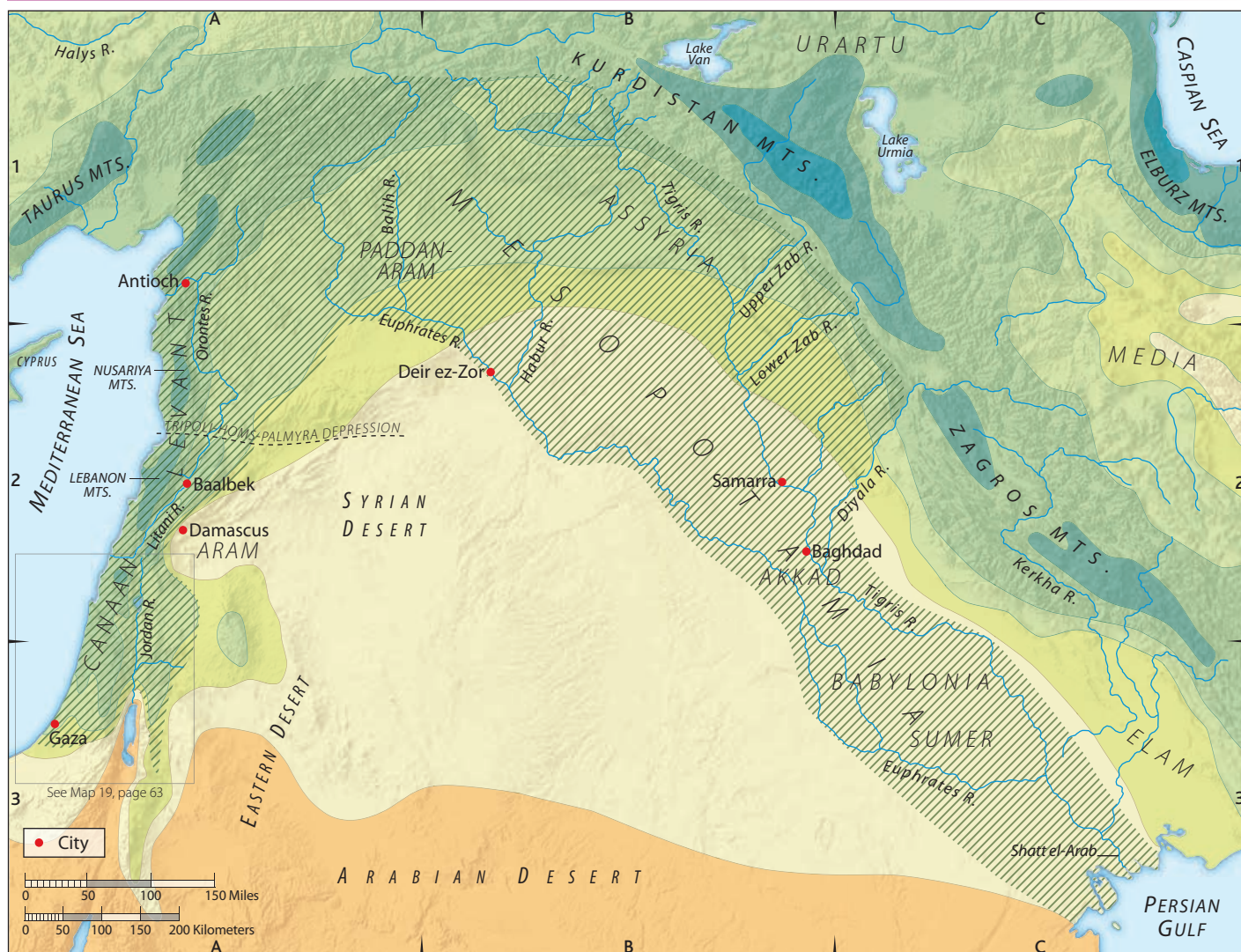
Both the city of Diyarbekir (on the horizon) and local sheep (right of river) draw their sustenance from the waters of the upper Tigris river.



Geographical Barriers and the Ancient World







the sinuous ribbons of greenery in the flood plains of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, their tributaries, and interlocking canal systems.

The western sphere of the Fertile Crescent is called the Levant, a French word meaning “rising” that refers to either the rising of the sun or the heights/rising of mountains as viewed from a ship on the Mediterranean headed in that direction. This geographic area consists of a double alignment of

mountain belts enclosing the northern portion of the Afro-Arabian fault line. [See maps 1 and 13.] Longitudinally segmented by three “depressions,” these belts comprise a series of four sets of parallel ranges [See map 3]:

1. Beginning in the north, near Antioch and the Amuq Plain, is the Nusariya mountain chain, which technically includes Mt. Cassius. [See map 109.] This chain dominates the western horizon, while the Zawiya chain

and its northern outliers rise in the east. It stretches as far south as the so-called Tripoli-Homs-Palmyra depression—a valley through which courses the el-Kabir (Eleutherus) River that demarcates the modern border between Syria and Lebanon.

2. In the territory south of this lateral gap stand the mighty Lebanon Mountains in the western field of view. Opposite them on the east, the Anti-Lebanon chain is found, which achieves its greatest height in the southern extremity at Mt. Hermon. The Lebanons range as far as the deep gorge created by the Litani River (immediately north of Tyre), extending east past the site of Dan and on to the flat steppe that separates the hills of Damascus and the basaltic plateau of Jebel Druze.
3. Proceeding south, spanning the area between the so-called Litani-Dan-Steppeland depression and the Beersheba-Zered depression, stand the highlands of Galilee, Samaria, and Judah on the western front. Prominent in the east are the Golan Heights, the Gilead Plateau, and the Moabite Highlands.



4. South of the Beersheba-Zered depression as far as the Red Sea, the western vista features the wild and forbidding slopes of the Wilderness of Zin and the modern Negeb. The eastern horizon is dominated by the towering sandstone highlands of Edom and the spectacular granite mountains of Midian. (Whether or not this fourth area is technically to be included in the Levant remains an open question. Primarily because this is a geographic discussion, the section is mentioned here in the text, but will be excluded from the map and from subsequent discussion in this section.)

Separating these parallel mountain ranges is the Great Rift Valley (the northernmost portion of the Afro-Arabian Rift Valley). In the north, the Nusariya and Zawiya mountains fall precipitously—more than 3,000 feet—into this chasm, known there as the Ghab (“thicket” or “depression”), which is drained by the meandering Orontes River. South of that, the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains, which rise to heights in excess of 10,000 feet, fall off abruptly into the trough, known in that region as the Beqa` (“a place of stagnant water”), drained primarily by the Litani and Abana rivers. Continuing south, the highlands of Galilee, Samaria, and northern Judah, and the heights of Golan and Gilead, drop off into the narrow chasm referred to as the Arabah (“wasteland, desert-plain”). This depression north of the Dead Sea may also be identified as the Jordan Rift Valley, named for the river that drains it.

It is instructive to analyze the Levant using a longitudinal cross section. From such a perspective, the Levant itself bears the shape of a mountain, highest in the center, with certain topographic and physiographic features mirrored on the

Virtually encircled by modern roads, Tel Dan sits adjacent to the river Dan (N. Qadi) in steppeland just south of Mt. Hermon.

two sloping sides. The key to the geography of the Levant is its towering apex. The lofty elevation of the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains far exceeds that of the ranges to the north or the south. In addition, they exhibit an unusual feature of geological structure not present in adjoining regions: a substantial substratum of impermeable, nonporous rocks within their uplift. Because of this layer, water is forced to the surface in vast quantities, producing hundreds of large and prolific springs at the unusually high altitude of 4,000 to 5,000 feet above sea level. Some of these torrents have a flow of several thousand cubic feet per second and emerge from the sides of the mountains as small rivers or cascading rivulets. They form the headwaters of at least four major rivers: the Litani, the Abana, the Orontes, and the Jordan.

In a number of fundamental ways, a certain symmetry can also be observed in the two outlying river valleys (especially prior to the 20th century, when dams were erected on each river). Both the Orontes and Jordan rivers had steep gradients, particularly near their headwaters in the elevated heights of Lebanon, and were so fast-moving that they were erosive instead of depository in nature. Neither river has been navigable to any degree throughout history. In their descents, both rivers had to cut through a basaltic dam in antiquity, thereby creating an intermediate lake (Lake of Homs on the Orontes; Lake Hula on the Jordan). Both rivers have seasonal flows that are unfavorable to the agricultural cycle, so were of little value for irrigational purposes. The soils around the

Orontes and Jordan are of similar types: alluvial soils along the banks, saline at certain places (especially along the Jordan).

The sets of mountains flanking the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon ranges on the north and south sides are themselves symmetrical in certain respects. Both are comprised mostly of limestone and manifest an internal transverse valley (Ugarit Valley in the north; Jezreel [Esdraelon] Valley in the south). Both ranges have an approximate longitudinal shape and comparative elevation of 2,500 to 3,500 feet, with peaks approaching 4,500 to 5,000 feet. They each receive similar rainfall amounts (20 to 40 inches annually) in similar seasonal patterns. In both cases, precipitation amounts increase toward the north and on their western flanks, precisely on terrain where farming is least productive and irrigation has negligible value. The soils of both ranges produce similar growth: Mediterranean scrubs, tamarisk, and brushwood cover many slopes; seasonal grasses suitable only for grazing survive on plateaus; reed grass grows in swamps; and anemones, poppies, and wildflowers abound. Food crops include grains (wheat, barley, maize), and a wide range of vegetables can be grown on the coastal plains. Citrus trees as well as many fig, carob, olive, and date trees can be found; the few hardwood forests that were not pillaged in earlier history are exceedingly small. Stratification in both of these lands provides comparatively meager mineral resources, mainly asphalt deposits and mineral springs. Both mountainous areas are flanked on the west by a fairly narrow, flat coastline, consisting mainly of sand and sand dunes.

AS A LAND PREPARED BY GOD THEOLOGICAL BORDERS

Even though Israel's borders are discussed in more than one biblical text, significant questions of location remain with respect to three of the four borders. Perhaps a proper starting point for a discussion of these borders is the acknowledgement that they were frequently set at natural topographic locations: the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee, the Mediterranean, major mountains and rivers, etc. This provides warrant for suggesting that many of the lesser-known segments of the border descriptions may also have been situated at natural geographical points. The following treatment will include a delineation of fixed points, an analysis of lesser known but nevertheless important points of reference, and some discussion of the issues involved. Each segment will culminate with a summary of where the evidence seems to point.

WESTERN BORDER

(Num. 34:6; Josh. 15:4; 16:3, 8; 17:9; 19:29; cf. Ezek. 47:20; 48:1) The western border happily presents no problem in identification. It extends to the Great Sea, the Mediterranean, from the northern extremity of the tribe of Asher (Josh. 19:29) to the southern extremity of the tribe of Judah (Josh. 15:4).

NORTHERN BORDER

(Num. 34:7–9; cf. Ezek. 47:15–17; 48:1–7)

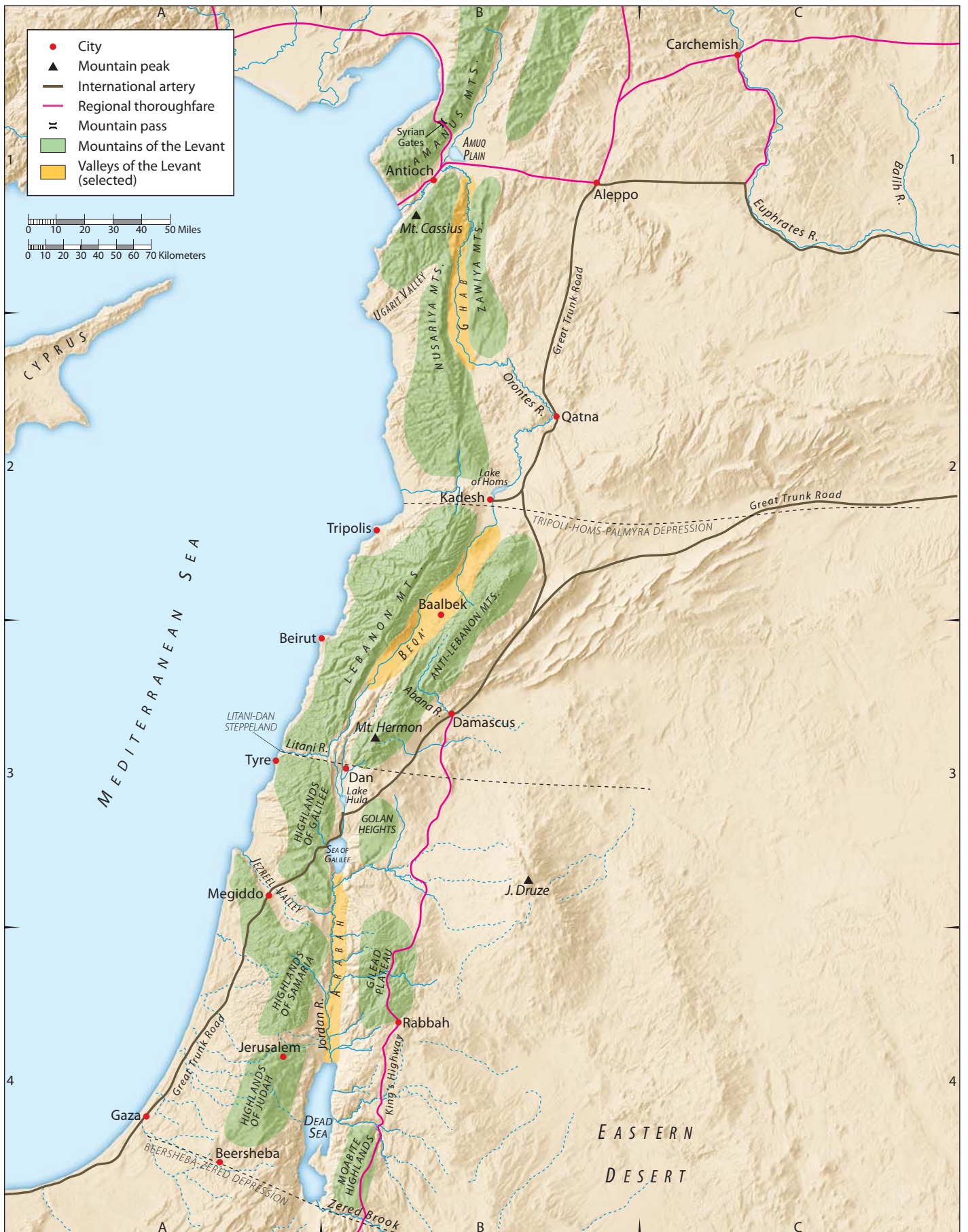
Taken as a whole, the biblical texts indicate that the northern border extended eastward from the Mediterranean on a line that ran to Zedad, passing Mt. Hor and Lebo-hamath. From Zedad, the line continued via Ziphron to Hazar-enan, where it turned toward the border of Hauran. Of these places, only two can be identified positively, and both are situated on the edge of the Syrian/Eastern Desert. Zedad should be situated at modern Sadad, about 40 miles east of the Orontes and 65 miles northeast of Damascus, just east of the present-day Damascus-Homs highway. [See map 4.]

Hauran doubtless refers to the plateau that extends east of the Sea of Galilee and is dominated by Jebel Druze. (Mt. Hauran was classical Auranitis.) The name Hauran for this region is frequently attested in neo-Assyrian texts as early as Shalmaneser III,¹⁹ and in fact, Hauran became the name of an Assyrian province²⁰ near the territory of Damascus, as is also seen in the wording of the Ezekiel texts. [See map 78.] Owing to these two identifications, it is reasonable to seek the intermediate sites of Ziphron and Hazar-enan along the perimeter of the same desert wasteland. The site of Hazar-enan is often equated with the lush and historically significant oasis of Qaryatein,²¹ based on the meaning of the Hebrew name (“village of a spring”). Beyond this, the exact course of the northern border becomes a matter of uncertainty.

There are a number of indications, however, which combine to suggest that this border might have corresponded to a clearly established boundary in antiquity. First, the site of Lebo-hamath²² should be associated with modern Lebweh, a town located in the forest region of the watershed that divides the Orontes and Litani rivers, some 15 miles northeast of Baalbek, along the Riblah-Baalbek highway. [See map 25.] The site was attested in Egyptian, Assyrian, and classical literatures²³ as a city of some prominence. Located between Kadesh on the Orontes and Baalbek, Lebo-hamath was situated in a territory commonly recognized in antiquity as a major boundary in the Beqa` Valley (1 Kings 8:65; 1 Chron. 13:5; 2 Chron. 7:8).

Second, in the place of Lebo-hamath, Ezekiel (47:16) references the site of Berothai, a town otherwise located in the central Beqa` Valley (2 Sam. 8:8) and generally thought to be reflected in the modern town of Brital, situated just south of Baalbek. However, Ezekiel goes on to specify that Berothai lay “on the *border* between Damascus and Hamath.” (In 2 Kings 23:33 and 25:21, the site of Riblah [Rablah] is said to have been “in the land of Hamath.”) It seems reasonable, then, that Ezekiel was describing this sector of Israel's northern border in a way that closely corresponded to an internationally recognized buffer zone in his day.

The book of Numbers marks the northern border between Lebo-hamath and the Mediterranean at Mt. Hor, a site which



cannot be definitively located but which must refer to one of the summits within the northern Lebanon range between Lebweh and the Sea. A number of prominent peaks, both inland (Akkar, Makmel, Mneitri, Sannin) and along the coast (Ras Shakkah), have been identified with biblical Mt. Hor.

Although any proposal is ultimately speculative, a fairly strong case can be developed for identifying Mt. Hor with modern Mt. Akkar. First, as already mentioned, the northern border at other points appears to have followed the line of a natural, ancient boundary. The western portion of that same boundary extended westward from Homs through what is known as the Tripolis-Homs-Palmyra depression. [See map 3.] Also running through much of this depression was the el-Kabir River, which empties into the Mediterranean just south of modern Sumra/Simyra. This depression now forms the boundary between the modern countries of Syria and Lebanon after sitting approximate to an established boundary during several periods of antiquity.²⁴ Juxtaposed to this valley at the northernmost extremity of the Lebanon range stands the lofty Mt. Akkar. Unlike other candidates for Mt. Hor, Mt. Akkar rises contiguous to this ancient and longstanding boundary.

Moreover, it is of interest that, instead of listing Mt. Hor between the Mediterranean and Lebo-hamath in the northern border, Ezekiel (47:15; 48:1) made reference to “the way of Hethlon,” an unknown site but one which may be reflected in the name of the modern town Heitela, located some 23 miles northeast of Tripolis and only about two miles from the el-Kabir River.²⁵

Given the location of the fixed sites and the repeated suggestion that other places may be associated with what was an established boundary in antiquity, it seems feasible that Israel’s northern border stretched along the northern edges of the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains, following the course of the el-Kabir River as far as the vicinity of the Lake of Homs, then running south in the Beqa’ as far as the outer flanks of the Anti-Lebanon Mountain (the area of Lebo-hamath). It then skirted that mountain in an eastward direction as far as the Eastern Desert (the vicinity of Sadad), where it essentially followed the fringes of the desert to the area of Mt. Hauran.

Other biblical texts at first blush seem to indicate that Israel’s border extended to “the great river, the river Euphrates” (e.g., Gen. 15:18; Josh. 1:4; cf. Deut. 11:24). One problem in deciphering this expression is related to its exact application: it may be employed to describe Israel’s *northern* frontier (e.g., Gen. 15:18; cf. Ex. 23:31) or Israel’s *eastern* frontier (e.g., Deut. 11:24). This ambiguity has led some writers to interpret the terminology in these texts not as a delineated border, but rather as idealized territorial terminal points, anticipating the grandeur of David’s or Solomon’s kingdom when Israelite control extended as far afield as the Euphrates (1 Kings 4:21; 1 Chron. 18:3; 2 Chron. 9:26).

Support for this view may be found in the more expansive corollary reference to the “river of Egypt” (the easternmost arm of the Nile Delta) in the Genesis 15 text, whereas the territorial border text of Numbers 34:5 and the tribal border text of Joshua 15:4 (cf. Ezek. 47:19; 48:28) more narrowly restrict that southern frontier to the “brook/wadi of Egypt” (W. el-Arish). Other authorities regard the more enlarged description of Genesis 15 to be geographically related to the Persian (Assyrian?) provincial name “Beyond the River,” indicating the territory of Palestine and Syria (cf. Ezra 4:10–11, 16–17, 20; 5:3; 6:6, 8, 13; 8:36; Neh. 2:7, 9; 3:7),²⁶ whereas the Numbers 34 and Joshua 15 texts have in view only the geography of the land of Canaan. Still other scholars regard the words “the great river” as a reference to the aforementioned el-Kabir River, to which an interpolation (“the river Euphrates”) was added later.²⁷ After all, the modern Arabic name of this river (Nahr el-Kabir) means “the great river”—a well-deserved name, as the el-Kabir drains the greatest extent of Lebanon’s coastal ranges. In this final scenario, amid the political realities of the United Monarchy, “the great river” might have come to assume a double meaning, referring both to Israel’s actual northern border at the el-Kabir, as well as to its idealized frontier at the Euphrates. In any event, the Euphrates terminology is excluded from texts delineating the specific borders of biblical Israel.

EASTERN BORDER

(Num. 34:10–12; Josh. 13:8–23; cf. Ezek. 47:18)

A determination of the eastern border will depend upon two related issues: (1) the course one charts for the northern border; and (2) the relevance one assigns the battles against Sihon and Og (Num. 21:21–35). Placement of all sites mentioned in conjunction with the eastern border is a matter of conjecture, except the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. But it is precisely involving the Jordan that a major issue surfaces: Were the territories east of the Jordan and eventually occupied by the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh *beyond* or *within* the territory given Israel? Stated otherwise, did Israel’s occupation of its land commence at the crossing of the Jordan River (Josh. 3) or did it commence at the crossing of the Arnon River (Num. 21:13; cf. Deut. 2:16–37; Judg. 11:13–26)?

Many recent studies have adopted the former option, with the result that the eastern border of Israel has been drawn at the Jordan River, between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. However, such a view may be greatly influenced by Christian hymnology²⁸ and must inherently embrace the premise that the eastern border of biblical Israel corresponds to the eastern border of the entity known as Canaan. Such a view is at variance with the verdict of Joshua 22 (esp. vv. 9–11, 13, 32), where the three Transjordanian tribes are clearly portrayed as being part of Israel and part of its 12 tribes, yet they were allotted territories beyond the eastern border of Canaan



(which does end at the Jordan River). Those tribes were given land in Bashan (Josh. 13:11–12; 17:1; 20:7; 22:7), in Gilead (Josh. 13:31; 17:1), and in the Mishor (Josh. 13:9, 20:8), in contradistinction to the “land of Canaan” (Josh. 22:9, 10, 32).²⁹

The weight of certain biblical data can suggest an alternate hypothesis that the border of Israel’s allotted land should be extended east as far as the fringes of the Eastern Desert, roughly approximating a line that could be drawn from the region of Mt. Hauran (the end of the northern border) to the wilderness of Kedemoth (near the Arnon), the place from which Moses had dispatched spies to Sihon, king of Heshbon (Deut. 2:24–26), and which was later allotted to the tribe of Reuben (Josh. 13:18). This hypothesis is supported by three lines of reasoning.

1. Deuteronomy 2—3 reviews the victories gained over Sihon and Og and the territorial allocation of their land to the two and a half tribes of Israel. This allotment included terrain from the Arnon to Mt. Hermon, taking in the lands of the Mishor, Gilead, and Bashan as far as Salecah and Edrei (Deut. 3:8; cf. 4:48; Josh. 13:8–12). At the same time, Deuteronomy 2:12 declares that just as the Edomites had destroyed the Horites in order to gain for themselves a possession of land, so Israel dispossessed other peoples to gain its inheritance. The wording here is unequivocal and logically requires that the passage be interpreted in one of two ways: either it is a historical description of those victories gained over the two Amorite kings—Sihon and Og—or it is a much later insertion in the text added in historical retrospect to describe what eventually took place in the biblical conquest under Joshua.

Now, the question in Deuteronomy 2:12 is not whether post-Mosaic expressions exist in the biblical text, but whether this verse represents one such specimen. It seems that the whole of this chapter presents a rather sustained argument that pivots on a sharp distinction between those territories excluded from Israel’s inheritance (Edom, Moab, Ammon) and those included in its inheritance (Bashan, Gilead, Mishor). In this regard, verse 12 seems to assert that both Edom and Israel received their respective territories by sovereign prerogative, not military skill. Because of that, there is established a clear theological reason Israel must not conquer land beyond its own perimeter (cf. Judg. 11:13–28; 2 Chron. 20:10; see also Deut. 2:20–22—an Ammonite and Edomite exodus?). If this is the case, verse 12 would then form part of the fabric of the entire narrative and could not easily be dismissed editorially. But even if verse 12 were taken as a later insertion, one is still left with a similar, transparent assertion in verses 24 and 31, which normally have not been regarded as later insertions.³⁰ If the theme developed in these verses is best understood to refer to the historical events surrounding the defeat of kings Sihon and Og as an integral part of the narrative as a whole, verse 12 is then

a completely lucid and unambiguous statement regarding the eastern boundary of Israel (Josh. 12:6).

2. At the command of God, due consideration was given the territory east of the Jordan River in the apportionment of cities of refuge (Num. 35:9–34; Deut. 4:41–43; 19:1–10; Josh. 20:1–9) and levitical cities (Lev. 25:32–33; Num. 35:1–8; Josh. 21:8–42; 1 Chron. 6:54–81); in the latter instance, ten of the 48 levitical cities were located in Transjordanian territory. [See map 41.] Whereas the territory of the tribe of Manasseh was divided as a result of that tribe’s own request, Levi’s territorial inheritance was split as a result of divine prescription, a thought that seems illogical and even preposterous if the territories east of the Jordan are to be excluded from the inheritance of Israel.
3. The attitudes displayed by Moses (Num. 32) and Joshua (Josh. 22) cohere with this thesis. Though Moses first objected when confronted with the request for Transjordanian inheritance, it is crucial to understand the nature of his response. It had been a *national* effort that brought about Israelite control of eastern territories, he stressed; any lesser effort could weaken the resolve of the remaining tribes and lead ultimately to divine judgment. As a result, Moses laid down a precondition before the two and a half tribes could receive Transjordanian inheritance: their armed men must join in the fight for Canaan! Moses’ concern was one of justice and potential faintheartedness, not one of irreconcilability with the plan and purposes of God. And later, after the two and a half tribes had fulfilled their vow and the land of Canaan had been secured, Joshua—by divine directive—dispatched those tribes to their rightful inheritance with the blessing and instruction of the Lord.

One may object that this hypothesis is not in harmony with Numbers 34:10–12, where the Jordan River is clearly demarcated as the eastern border. Perhaps this objection can be addressed both geopolitically and contextually. On the one hand, a case can be made that Numbers 34 is delineating the frontiers of the land of Canaan (which on the east extended as far as the Jordan), not the whole of the land given to biblical Israel (vv. 2, 29). On the other, the context of Numbers 34 seems to refer to the land that at the time remained unconquered but eventually would be occupied by the remaining nine and a half tribes (vv. 2, 13–15; cf. Deut. 1:7–8). An unrealized territorial objective in the narrative, that perimeter stood in marked contrast to the already vanquished territories previously controlled by Sihon and Og (Num. 21) but now theoretically given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh (Num. 32). Numbers 34, therefore, seems to be describing a territory *that was yet to be conquered* (Canaan), in contrast to the entire territory divinely apportioned and destined for biblical Israel’s

inheritance. In light of these considerations, then, it seems that no necessary discrepancy exists between this narrative, other biblical texts related to the placement of the eastern border, and a hypothesis that traces the eastern border along the frontier of the great Eastern Desert.

SOUTHERN BORDER

(Num. 34:3–5; Josh. 15:1–4; cf. Ezek. 47:19; 48:28)

The crucial issue to be decided in relation to Israel's southern border has to do with where this border met the Mediterranean Sea. Did this occur at the "river" of Egypt (the easternmost segment of the Nile Delta) or at the "brook/wadi" of Egypt (the W. el-Arish)? All four biblical texts that delineate the southern border of Israel employ the lexeme *naḥal* ("brook/wadi"), not *nāhār* ("river").³¹ The expression "the wadi of [the land of] Egypt" occurs in cuneiform texts as early as Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II, describing military actions south of Gaza, but not inside Egypt.³²

The book of Judith (1:7–11), describing how Nebuchadnezzar attempted to conscript an army in order to wage war against the Medes, provides a detailed listing of places: Cilicia, Damascus, the mountains of Lebanon, Carmel, Gilead, Upper Galilee, Esdraelon, Samaria, Jerusalem . . . Kadesh, the wadi of Egypt, Tahpanhes, Ra'amses, Goshen, Memphis, and Ethiopia. The geographical sequence of this text is clearly proceeding in a southerly direction, thereby placing the wadi of Egypt between Kadesh (either Kadesh-barnea or Kadesh of Judah) and Tahpanhes (T. Defana, an outpost on the main road between Palestine and the Nile Delta). [See map 33.] One should also note the LXX rendition of Isaiah 27:12, where *naḥal mišrayim* ("brook/wadi of Egypt") is rendered *Rhinocorura*, the Greek word for the classical settlement occupied today by the townlet El-Arish.³³ [See map 118.]

The vast W. el-Arish system is the most prominent geographical feature south of the populated areas of Palestine. It courses for almost 150 miles before it is emptied into the Mediterranean Sea about 50 miles south of Gaza, draining most of northern Sinai, the western portions of the modern Negeb, and part of southern Philistia. [See map 34.] Modern geographers sometimes describe W. el-Arish as being situated on a natural geological border between the Negeb plateau and Sinai.³⁴ All of this evidence favors identifying the biblical "brook/wadi of Egypt" with the modern W. el-Arish.³⁵

Related to this data is the placement of the site of Kadesh-barnea. Along the western edge of the modern Negeb plateau are three important springs that have been associated with its location: Ain Qadeis, Ain Qudeirat (about six miles to the northwest), and Ain Quseima (another four miles to the northwest). All three springs are situated along the W. el-Arish geological boundary, none is clearly eliminated on the basis of ceramic remains, and each offers a distinctive consideration when attempting to locate Kadesh-barnea. The candidacy of

Ain Qadeis rests on three considerations: (1) in both biblical border descriptions (Num. 34:4; Josh. 15:3–4) that provide an east-west sequence, Kadesh-barnea is listed *before* Hazar-addar and Azmon; (2) this site retains the namesake of the biblical city; and (3) the site is situated on the edge of a large open plain capable of accommodating a large encampment. Ain Qudeirat offers the advantage of a copious water supply, by far the largest in the area. And Ain Quseima is located very near an important intersection of two roads that link the Negeb with Sinai and Egypt. [See map 27.] Not surprisingly, therefore, each of these three sites has been identified as Kadesh-barnea at one time or another.

One infers from the biblical texts that Israel encamped at Kadesh-barnea for the greater part of 40 years (Deut. 1:46; 2:14). Geographically speaking, this entire area offers a generally hostile and bleak environment for human occupation, so it may be that all three of these sites, as well as all of the intermediate territory, was required to accommodate Israel's encampment. Nevertheless, for the sake of map facilitation, Kadesh-barnea has been located at Ain Qadeis, Hazar-addar at Ain Qudeirat, and Azmon at Ain Quseima, though these placements are quite tentative. [See map 22 (B15–16).]

As with the other borders, the southern border of Israel was most likely set primarily in accordance with natural geographic features. Following a semicircular arc, this border probably extended in a southwesterly direction from the Dead Sea, via the Rift Valley and Tamar, to the environs of the Wadi Murra. Here it passed by the Hazera ridge and came to the Ascent of Akrabbim ("ascent of the scorpions"), which is commonly affiliated with Neqb Safa.³⁶ There an early Israeli road from Beersheba, which crosses Jebel Hathira, plunges abruptly into Wadi Murra. From that point, it is reasonable to infer that the border continued to follow the contour of the wadi in a southwesterly course until eventually it arrived in the vicinity of a slender, diagonal corridor of Turonian limestone, which extends about 30 miles from Mt. Teref to Mt. Kharif and separates the Rimmon summit from the Eocene acreage to its north. After traversing that corridor to its opposite end, one is only about five miles from the upper courses of the W. Kadesh (a tributary of the el-Arish drainage system). Following the tributary past Ain Qadeis (Kadesh-barnea), then past Ain Qudeirat and Ain Quseima, the southern border seems to have followed the course of this "brook/wadi of Egypt" the entire distance to the Mediterranean.

HISTORICAL TERMINOLOGY

Unfortunately, the southern Levant had neither a geographically nor a chronologically inclusive name in antiquity. Instead, the land of biblical Israel is designated by an array of biblical and/or secular terms, none of which can be understood to be completely coextensive with Israel's

theological borders (or one another), and none of which can be applied across the entire span of biblical history without creating some anachronism.

In many cases in antiquity, names that previously had been employed to denote a god or a major population group were simply borrowed and reapplied to designate a geopolitical entity that was home to that group. For example, the name “Canaan” derived from the Canaanites; “Palestine” owed its existence to the Philistines; and “[the land of] Hatti” originally designated a series of neo-Hittite city-states located approximately between Carchemish and Damascus [map 3] whose residents seem to be descendants of Heth (e.g., Gen. 10:15; 1 Chron. 1:13) and/or devotees of the god Hatti.³⁷ Both the Canaanites and the Hittites were said to be among the “occupants of the land” at the time of Israel’s settlement (Deut. 7:1; Josh. 3:10; 12:8; cf. Gen. 15:18–21; Ex. 3:8, 17), and the Philistines are known to have emigrated to that land around 1200 B.C.

CANAAN

The term Canaan/Canaanite(s) is well attested throughout much of second-millennium B.C. literature.³⁸ To judge from this usage, Canaan appears to have been the conventional term to designate Egypt’s southern holdings in Asia, in contrast to Amurru (Amorite land north of the el-Kabir River). Canaan extended from the southern towns of Gaza and Raphia [map 44] as far north as the el-Kabir River valley and the site of Sumra/Simyra.³⁹ The general picture that emerges, therefore, is that Near Eastern and biblical citations bear a remarkable similarity in their delineation of Canaan. (See the earlier discussion of Israel’s theological borders.) Such an assertion may bear consequences regarding the antiquity and essential historicity of those narratives containing Israel’s borders.

Prior to archaeological discoveries at Nuzi [map 23], the word “Canaan” was generally thought to be derived from a Semitic verb meaning “to bend/bow down/be low,” because Canaanites occupied the lowland near the sea, in contrast to the hill country of the Amorites (Num. 13:29; Josh. 5:1; cf. Isa. 23:11). A related theory was that Canaan was the place the sun “bends down” (sets), so a Canaanite was by definition a “westerner.”⁴⁰ But at Nuzi the word *kinahhu*⁴¹ was found to refer to a red-purple substance extracted from murex seashells and used in the dyeing of fabric, especially wool.

Ancient literature is replete with references to the great esteem given someone who was clothed in purple. Murex dye, being natural and not manufactured, was highly prized because it never faded. The lucrative murex industry was concentrated north of Caesarea, on the Mediterranean, where an abundant supply of murex shells regularly washed ashore. At Tyre, a large number of the shells have been found on the site of an ancient dye factory,⁴² and clear evidence of the

dyeing process has also been found at Dor.⁴³ Further indication that murex dyeing was an economically pivotal industry in that region may be found in certain Canaanite place-names in the vicinity. For example, Zarephath comes from a verb meaning “to dye,” and Zobah derives from a verb denoting the dyeing of cloth. The word “Canaanite” itself is sometimes rendered “trader/merchant.”⁴⁴ As a result, it appears preferable to understand Canaan as “the purple land,” and Canaanites as “the people of the purple land” (from which the concept of trading generally could easily derive).

We learn from Greek literature that the cultural heirs of this dye industry in the first millennium were called Phoenicians, which derives from the Greek word *phoinix* (“purple”). Even as late as the New Testament, it seems that references to Canaanites and Phoenicians were still being used somewhat interchangeably. (Matthew 15:22 refers to a Canaanite woman; Mark’s version of the same story calls her a Syro-Phoenician woman [Mark 7:26].) It appears then that “Canaan” differs from “Phoenicia” only in two fundamental ways: (1) the former is a Semitic word whereas the latter is of Greek extraction; and (2) the former is employed in the second millennium B.C. whereas the latter becomes a normative term in the first millennium B.C. If we follow the logic of all this evidence, it appears that the same word first connoted the process of dyeing, in time was extended to the people involved in the process, and eventually evolved to include the territory/province where those people were a dominant population group.

PALESTINE

For reasons as yet unclear to us, much of the biblical world experienced a major political upheaval around 1200 B.C., stemming largely from companies of invaders referred to in Egyptian sources as “Sea Peoples.” Scholars have long pondered what occasioned this southeastward movement of approximately 14 people groups: Denyen, Lukka, Shardanu, Masha, Arinna, Karkisha, Pitassa, Kashka, Akawasha, Tursha, Sheklesh, Peleset (Philistines), Tjekker, and Weshesh. (These are approximate spellings.) Although two or three of these groups also appear in earlier literature from the Levant or Egypt, there seems to have been a rather widespread migration around this time. Was their displacement a function of climate change that may have produced famine, a consequence of the political turbulence that surrounded the Battle of Troy or the Dorian invasion of Greece, or some other factor? Whatever the case, before striking at the heart of Egypt, various contingents of the Sea Peoples were probably responsible for the demise of the Hittite Empire centered in Asia Minor, the capture of the island of Cyprus, and the ravaging and/or reoccupation of many cities across the Levant: Ugarit, Alalakh, Carchemish, T. Sukas, Tyre, Sidon, Hazor, Acco, Dor, and a host of sites in the Philistine plain. The Egyptians withstood the Sea Peoples, however, and their literature indicates that

the Philistines were repelled from Egyptian soil toward the northeast,⁴⁵ where they later inhabited southwestern Canaan, which became known as the Philistine plain.

The place from which the Philistines emigrated also continues to be a debated issue.⁴⁶ The biblical tradition that they hailed from Caphtor (Crete) is not decisive because that text declares the Philistines were brought from Caphtor in the same way the Israelites were brought from Egypt (Amos 9:7; cf. Gen. 10:14; 1 Chron. 1:12; Jer. 47:4; Ezek. 25:16; Zeph. 2:5). That is to say, the Bible may not be stipulating the aboriginal home of either people. Some scholars argue that Philistines migrated from Greece, basing their opinion on certain aspects of their material culture (stylized coffins, characteristic pottery, etc.) or on biblical words found in Philistine narratives (*champion*, *lord*, *helmet*, *chest*). Others have asserted that the Philistines originated along the seacoasts of modern southwestern Turkey, predicated on Greek epics and the LXX rendering of Caphtor (“Cappadocia”) in Deuteronomy 2:23 and Amos 9:7. But this all remains highly speculative, in part because of a paucity of explicitly Philistine texts and in part because the Philistines began to undergo the process of cultural assimilation soon after their arrival in Canaan. The only sure conclusion one can reach is that the word *Palestine* as a discreet geographical entity obviously derives from the Philistines.

It is sometimes asserted today that the term “Palestine” did not come into existence as a designation for the land of Israel until the mid-second century A.D. when, as political punishment for the Bar-Kochba revolt, the Emperor Hadrian deliberately co-opted the name of Israel’s ancient enemies—

the Philistines—and simply Latinized it to create obvious pejorative connotations.⁴⁷ According to this viewpoint, the earliest use of “Palestine” represented early Roman propaganda, with intense anti-Jewish political implications. If so, then any present-day use of the word *Palestine* in reference to history before the time of Hadrian is at best dangerously anachronistic and historically erroneous, and, at worst, anti-biblical⁴⁸ or even anti-Jewish.

Yet there is evidence to indicate otherwise. To begin with, the name *Palestine* appears thirteen times in neo-Assyrian texts from as early as Adad-nirari III (810–782 B.C.), Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.), and Sargon II (721–705 B.C.).⁴⁹ It is unlikely that any of those citations envisioned the land of Israel as a whole (as opposed to the region of Philistia). In fact, in one text *Palestine* is used in contrast to both Israel (literally, “the land of Omri”) and Edom.⁵⁰ However, in eleven instances, the word *Palestine* is prefaced by the semantic indicator for “land/country,” which gives unmistakable indication that the reference is to a discreet geographical entity. Similarly, an inscribed Egyptian statuette,⁵¹ dating presumably from the 27th dynasty (945–715 B.C.),⁵² makes reference to a “commissioner of Canaan and Palestine” (written *Plst*). In this case, the term *Palestine* is used in contradistinction to the territory of Canaan. One can again observe that the term is definitely found in a geographical/provincial (not political) context.

Part of the extensive archaeological remains from the New Palace period (c. 1700–1400 B.C.) at Zakros, on the southeast coast of Crete. Some authorities believe the Philistines may have hailed from Crete.



More germane to this contention, however, are the results of a computer search available through the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (University of California at Irvine). A search for “Palestine” as a proper name in texts written before the end of the first Christian century revealed 196 complete citations in Greek or Latin literature (excluding possible partial attestations of the word or citations found in small fragments of Greek papyri). Many of the citations do not apply to this argument for one reason or another.⁵³ However, the *TLG* search uncovered almost two dozen references to Palestine, dating between the fifth century B.C. and the first century A.D. (before Hadrian [A.D. 117–138]), where the term is used in an unambiguous context that cannot refer to, or be restricted to, Philistia and/or the Philistines.⁵⁴ Admittedly, the geographical details of classical writers may sometimes become confused, but surely it strains credulity to imagine that such a number of unequivocal citations could be summarily dismissed on such grounds.

Additional evidence for the use of “Palestine” before the time of Hadrian comes from an early Jewish source tentatively dated to the last half of the first century B.C.⁵⁵ Moreover, the Babylonian Talmud—composed before, during, and immediately after Hadrian’s reign—contains a few references to Palestine as a distinct, identifiable geographical entity.⁵⁶ The references are not political in nature and are manifestly not pejorative in tone. It is difficult to conceive that an emperor’s whim would influence such an orthodox and authoritative body of Jewish literature—especially from as far away as Babylon. [Note the eastern extent of the Roman Empire on map 98.] At stake was the very core of its identity.

Accordingly, based on this unambiguous empirical data from a host of primary sources—widely differentiated linguistically, conceptually, geographically, and chronologically—no factual basis exists for objecting to the use of “Palestine” in reference to biblical or historical matters prior to the time of Hadrian.⁵⁷

ISRAEL

The name Israel ultimately derives from the patriarch Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28). The expression “children of Israel” began to be employed rather commonly of the patriarchal descendants when they became enslaved in Egypt (Ex. 1:9–12; 2:23, 25; 3:9–11; etc.). Later, the name Israel came to be applied to the northern kingdom of Ephraim, in contrast to the southern kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12:18–20; 1 Chron. 5:17; etc.). Still later, after the collapse of the northern kingdom, “Israel” was occasionally used to denote the southern kingdom of Judah (Jer. 10:1).

Still, it is difficult to identify a biblical passage in which the word *Israel* is utilized explicitly to denote a specific stretch of geography. Admittedly, the expression “land of Israel” occurs (1 Sam. 13:19; 1 Chron. 22:2; 2 Chron. 2:17; Ezek. 40:2; 47:18), but it is always linked to the terrain occupied or to be

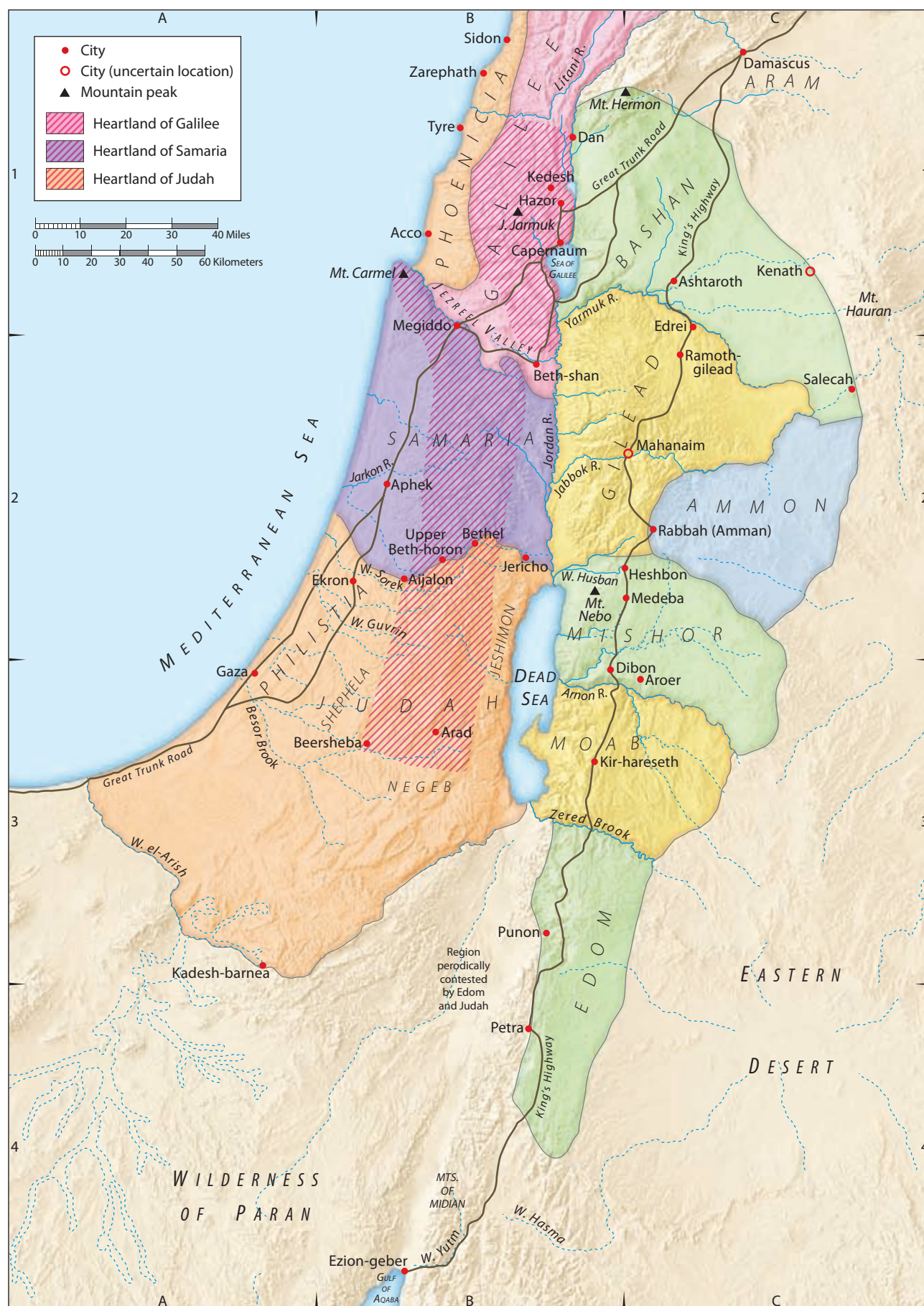
occupied by some or all of the people of Israel, and its extent fluctuates accordingly.

Outside of the Bible, “Israel” (i.e., the Israel of the Bible) occurs in three early texts. The oldest of these is a granite stela from the fifth year of Merneptah (1209 B.C.). [See text at maps 42 and 43 for translation.] The carved slab mentions Israel, but does so in a way that seems to point to an ethnic entity, and therefore the citation offers little assistance in defining the geographical boundaries of Israel. However, the Merneptah Stela represents the only extra-biblical witness to Israel before the ninth century B.C., when the name appears on two separate inscriptions.

The Black Obelisk is written in cuneiform and dates to the sixth year of Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (853 B.C.) when Ahab supplied 2,000 chariots and 10,000 soldiers to a coalition that fought against Shalmaneser’s forces. [See text at map 70.] The inscription makes reference to Ahab as “the king of Israel.”⁵⁸ A few years later (c. 835 B.C.), king Mesha of Moab had a basalt stela inscribed with a dedication to Chemosh, his god, in which he boasted that he took back territory that earlier had been conquered by Omri, “king of Israel.”⁵⁹ According to the Bible, Mesha of Moab was a subject of Israel during the days of Omri and Ahab who rebelled at the death of Ahab (2 Kings 3:4–5). However, an ensuing battle recorded in the Bible ended in a Moabite defeat (2 Kings 3:9–27). Attempting to harmonize this biblical verdict with the claim of victory on the Mesha Stela, some scholars argue that Mesha’s conquest over Israel dates a little later, during the reign of Jehoahaz.⁶⁰ Neither of these ninth-century B.C. inscriptions supplies geographic information of the sort that enables one to draw specific borders for Israel. Yet both are quite helpful in that each explicitly identifies by name a particular individual also known in the Bible as a “king of Israel.” The Mesha Inscription is also very useful in that it is rich in biblical terminology.⁶¹

GEOPOLITICAL DISTRICTS

Before engaging in a more extended discussion of the natural topographical features of Palestine, it is necessary to define and briefly delineate certain terms used in Scripture to signify the various geographical and/or geopolitical subdivisions of the land. In order to do this, however, it will be helpful to first introduce two modern geographical words that are sometimes employed to designate this land: *Cisjordan* (“this side [the west side] of the Jordan River”) and *Transjordan* (“across [the east side] the Jordan River”). We have already seen how the Jordan River has served as both a geographical and a political boundary at various times. And before proceeding, it is essential to understand the provisional nature of these subdivisions. The frontiers of a particular district may have fluctuated over the centuries, and they cannot be precisely fixed for every period. This problem is especially aggravated when one attempts to fix



frontiers of a district that existed throughout a large segment of biblical history, perhaps remaining in existence for more than a millennium. Moreover, it is necessary to bear in mind that one and the same stretch of geography frequently bore dissimilar names during different periods.

CISJORDAN

From a geopolitical perspective, Cisjordan can be said to be divided into four districts during most of biblical history. From north to south those four sections were Phoenicia, Galilee, Samaria, and Judah/Judea. [See maps 5 and 6.]

PHOENICIA

Phoenicia in the Old Testament is usually defined as a slender tract of coastland that stretched some 125 miles from the el-Kabir River to Mt. Carmel and was flanked on its east by the mountains of Lebanon and Galilee. By New Testament times, Mt. Carmel had fallen into the hands of monarchs from Tyre,⁶² so Phoenicia extended as far south as the plain of Dor. Phoenicia was the scene of two biblical miracles: at Zarephath, Elisha revived a widow's son who had stopped breathing (1 Kings 17:8–24), and in the region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus healed a Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:24–30). Phoenicia also played host to a number of early apostolic travels.

GALILEE

Just inland from the southern sector of Phoenicia lay the Galilean district, the northernmost territory actually occupied by ancient Israel. The heartland of Galilee, stretching from the Litani River and the site of Dan in the north as far south as the Jezreel valley, measured about 50 miles north-south and some 25 miles east-west. The district was at all times divided by a slender lateral valley that followed a fault line extending east from Acco/Ptolemais and ran to modern Rosh Pinna (just about ten miles due north of the Sea of Galilee). This Beth Kerem valley divides Galilee into two subdivisions: Upper Galilee and Lower Galilee.⁶³ The distinction is geographic and not administrative. Upper Galilee's rugged, virtually impassable terrain exceeds 3,300 feet, with part of its center boasting the highest altitude in all of Cisjordan. (J. Jarmuk is nearly 4,000 feet above sea level.) [See map 18.] The peaks of Lower Galilee remain below 2,000 feet high. Most biblical references to Galilee, including all New Testament references, are to Lower Galilee.

Because of its northerly location, Galilee was perhaps more vulnerable to cultural and military absorption (Isa. 9:1; Matt. 4:15–16; 2 Kings 15:29). Though inhabited during the settlement period by the tribes of Naphtali, Issachar, Zebulun, and perhaps part of Asher, from the Babylonian captivity onward (1 Kings 9:10–14), the Gentile population in Galilee remained dominant. [See map 40.] Therefore, the district was suspect both ideologically (John 1:46; cf. 7:41, 52) and linguistically (Matt. 26:73b).

Notwithstanding, Galilee became very important to Jew and Christian alike. For Jews, the city of Tiberias gradually became the center for Talmudic scholarship after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; here the Sanhedrin last sat, here the Mishna was edited, here were centered the families of Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali of Masoretic tradition, here the revered Aleppo Codex (the oldest and most complete Hebrew Bible in existence) was created, and here one finds the tombs of the Jewish sages Maimonides, Rabbi Akiba, and Johanan ben Zekkai. For Christians, Galilee was a center of Jesus' activities. He spent his boyhood in the sleepy village of Nazareth, headquartered his ministry in the important center of Capernaum, and, perhaps most interestingly, performed most of his public miracles here.

SAMARIA

To the south of Galilee stands the third subdivision—Samaria. It was known earlier as the hill country of Ephraim (Josh. 17:15; 19:50; Judg. 3:27; 4:5; 1 Sam. 1:1; 9:4; 1 Kings 4:8; 2 Kings 5:22)—not to be confused with the hill country of Judah. (See below.) The district of Samaria eventually drew its name from the third and final capital city of the northern kingdom (1 Kings 16:24). The heartland of Samaria stretched from the edge of the Jezreel valley as far south as the vicinity of a natural topographic line that extended west from Jericho, via the W. Makkuk, as far as Ophrah. [See maps 18 and 37 for W. Makkuk.] From there the border proceeded past Bethel and Upper Beth-horon, where it began its descent to Aijalon (cf. Josh. 10:11–12) and broke into the Coastal Plain opposite Gezer. Samaria, therefore, encompassed an area approximately 40 miles north-south and some 30 miles east-west. (From Josephus's description, one infers that New Testament Samaria was slightly reduced in its southern precinct.)⁶⁴

The natural geographic center of Samaria was at the city of Shechem, located in the vale between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim [map 11], adjacent to the modern city of Nablus. [See map 118.] Here the principal road coming north from Jerusalem (Central Ridge Road) linked with a secondary roadway (Ephraim lateral road) that connected Samaria with both the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. Not unexpectedly, therefore, Shechem witnessed periods of protracted occupation dating back as far as 4000 B.C. During much of the second millennium B.C., Shechem vied with Jerusalem for supremacy of central Palestine. The site was where Abraham first erected an altar and worshiped the Lord in Canaan (Gen. 12:6), where the bones of Joseph finally came to rest (Josh. 24:32; cf. Gen. 50:25–26; Ex. 13:19), where Israel's first attempt at monarchy was launched (Judg. 9), where the division of Israel's united monarchy occurred (1 Kings 12:1–16), where the first capital of the northern kingdom of Israel was situated (1 Kings 12:25), and where Jesus confronted a woman at the well (John 4:5).

Although eclipsed by the city of Samaria during most of the period of the divided monarchy, Shechem's ascendancy was reasserted after the Assyrians brought an end to the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. Captives from abroad were settled in Samarian cities (2 Kings 17:24–34). [See also maps 76 and 77.] Some of the refugees embraced a number of articles within Judaism and in time came to regard themselves as Jews (e.g., Ezra 4:2). Their bid for membership was largely repudiated by the post-exilic Jewish community, however, which set into motion a religious animosity that persisted throughout the remainder of the biblical period (Luke 9:52–53; John 4:9; 8:48). Nevertheless, Samaritanism has survived the centuries. One medieval report located some 400 Samaritans in Damascus.⁶⁵ Contemporary estimates of the Samaritan population in Israel range between 550 and 800 people who continue to celebrate the Passover annually atop Mt. Gerizim, their holy mountain (John 4:20).

JUDAH

The fourth major geopolitical subdivision of Cisjordan was Judah, referred to in earlier history as the hill country of Judah (Josh. 11:21; 15:48; 20:7; 21:11; cf. 2 Chron. 21:11; 27:4; Luke 1:65). According to 2 Kings 23:8, Judah extended from Geba, a strategic town located about five miles north of Jerusalem [map 22], as far south as Beersheba (Zech. 14:10). Thus, when understood also in the context of Israel's northern frontier at the city of Dan, this conforms to the recurring formula found in the Old Testament ("from Dan to Beersheba"), which denotes the practical boundaries of Israel's heartland (Judg. 20:1; 1 Sam. 3:20; 2 Sam. 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kings 4:25). The heartland of Judah may also be specifically delineated on its lateral axis, extending east as far as the precipitous descent into the Judean wilderness (Jeshimon [Num. 21:20; cf. 1 Sam. 26:1—Hachilah overlooks Jeshimon]) and as far west as the steep and rocky descent into a slender moat that divides it from the Shephela. (See below.) The heartland of Judah took in no more than 50 miles north-south and only about 20 miles east-west. Judah was only rarely attractive to empire builders as a very small territory that was largely comprised of large tracts of uncultivable soil, was rather isolated from international traffic, and never experienced independent material prosperity. One authority⁶⁶ described it as a secluded land that promoted a pastoral lifestyle and was a locale for fortresses, shrines, and villages.

IDUMEA

In addition to the four *major* geopolitical entities of Cisjordan, the province of Idumea played a secondary role in post-exilic and New Testament politics. Idumea is the Greek name for Edom applied specifically to Edomite refugees who fled northwest in order to avoid the growing pressure from their Nabatean neighbors. [See map 6.] Though constantly

fluctuating, being alternately detached from and reannexed to Judea, Idumean territory eventually stretched from the area of Beth-zur, near Hebron, as far south as Beersheba, and from the Dead Sea to the edge of the Philistine plain. [See map 85.] Maccabean rulers eventually subjugated Idumea. [See map 92.] One of them (Alexander Jannaeus) appointed a local Idumean chieftain, Antipater, over the region. Ironically, it was from the loins of Antipater that Herod the Great would be born in due course. As "king of the Jews" (Matt. 2:1), Herod was not so disposed to decentralize authority.

TRANSJORDAN

Old Testament Transjordan is composed of five geopolitical entities. From north to south they include Bashan, Gilead, Mishor, Moab, and Edom [see map 5]. The term "Transjordan" defines specifically the stretch of geography between Mt. Hermon and the Gulf of Aqaba (some 250 miles), and from the Jordan valley to fringes of the Eastern Desert (between 30 and 80 miles). The geopolitical character of this region is actually much more complicated than that of its Cisjordanian neighbor, and to attempt to address both Old Testament and New Testament Transjordan in a single discussion is only partially possible and certainly open to the possibility of imprecision. But again, the primary purpose here is to supply approximate location of geopolitical terms used in Scripture.

BASHAN

Bashan means "a fruitful/smooth land" (Josh. 9:10; 1 Kings 4:13; 2 Kings 10:33) and is the name of the territory that Israel's forces wrested from Og's control (Num. 21:33–35). It included 60 walled cities (Deut. 3:4–5) and was assigned to East Manasseh (Deut. 3:13). Bashan stretched for some 35 miles from Mt. Hermon (Josh. 12:4–5) down to the Yarmuk River⁶⁷ and extended as far east as Kenath (Num. 32:42) and Salecah (Deut. 3:10), towns situated on Mt. Hauran. During New Testament times, the region north of the Yarmuk essentially consisted of the provinces that made up the tetrarchy of Herod Philip, son of Herod the Great.⁶⁸ [See maps 6 and 100.]

GILEAD

Transjordan's second basic entity is Gilead. Though the Bible occasionally appears to utilize this word generically to refer to all of occupied Transjordan (Deut. 34:1–4; Josh. 22:9), the geopolitical entity of Gilead specifies the high, mountainous, oval-shaped dome that is, topographically speaking, an eastern extension of the Samarian elevation (Judg. 10:4; 1 Sam. 13:7; 2 Sam. 2:9; 2 Kings 10:33). This dome rises just a few miles south of the Yarmuk and extends south more or less as far as the W. Husban that flows into the Jordan opposite Jericho. [See also map 18.] Longitudinally, the Gilead dome was divided by the deep gorge cut by the Jabbok River, which divided Gilead into halves (cf. Josh. 12:5; 13:31, the northern

half; Deut. 3:12; Josh. 12:2, the southern half). On its eastern frontier, Gilead can only be defined negatively: it did not include the land of Ammon (Num. 21:23–24; Judg. 11:13; cf. 1 Sam. 11:1–4), so consequently it did not extend as far as the Eastern Desert in its southeastern quadrant.

The probable meaning of the name itself (“rugged land”), in contrast to its neighbors to the north (Bashan means “smooth land”) and south (Mishor means “tableland/plateau”), may help clarify Gilead’s borders. Thus delineated, the hill country of Gilead (Gen. 31:21, 23, 25; Deut. 3:12) encompassed some 35 miles north-south and not more than about 30 miles east-west. Most of northern Gilead became part of the inheritance of East Manasseh, whereas southern Gilead was allotted to the tribe of Gad. [See map 40.] The whole of the dome was effectively colonized by Israel, probably because its raised elevation permitted sufficient rainfall to support some forestation, agriculture, and animal husbandry (2 Sam. 18:6; Num. 32:1–4, 16, 26; Josh. 22:8). [See map 19.] The medicinal “balm of Gilead,”⁶⁹ whatever its exact character, was highly prized in antiquity (Jer. 8:22; 46:11; cf. Gen. 37:25).

Many Greek cities that had been established during the Alexandrian era formed a Transjordanian nucleus of (largely unsuccessful) opposition to the Jewish independence forged by the Hasmoneans. [See maps 90 and 92.] But when Pompey’s legions brought an end to Hasmonean dominance, many of those cities were restored to their Hellenistic compatriots. In some cases individual cities found it necessary to band together into mutual leagues of protection from their non-Greek neighbors, just as they were also bound together economically and socially. One such confederation, known as the Decapolis (“ten cities”), was comprised of sites primarily situated along the trade arteries of central and northern Transjordan. This group is mentioned both in the Bible (Matt. 4:25; Mark 5:20; 7:31) and in classical sources.⁷⁰ In the New Testament era, the cities probably included, from north to south: Damascus, Raphana, Canatha, Hippos, Gadara, Scythopolis, Pella, Dion, Gerasa, and Philadelphia. [See map 6.]⁷¹ While the purpose of such a loose Hellenistic confederation is at variance with any attempt to define clear geographical frontiers, one can conclude that the heartland of the Decapolis stretched across the Gilead highlands.

MISHOR

South of Old Testament Gilead lay the Mishor (“tableland,” e.g., Deut. 3:10; 4:43; Josh. 20:8), which stretched in the north from Heshbon (Josh. 13:10) and Medeba (Josh. 13:16) about 25 miles south to the cities of Aroer (Josh. 13:9) and Dibon (Jer. 48:22), situated just north of the Arnon canyon and near the King’s Highway. Other towns included in the Mishor were Nebo (Jer. 48:22); Shittim (where the Israelites entered into illicit sexual relations with Moabite women [Num. 25:1f]); Beth-peor (near where Moses was buried [Josh.

13:20; Deut. 34:6] and where Balaam uttered his untoward blessings [Num. 22:41; 23:13–14]); and Bezer, one of Israel’s cities of refuge (Deut. 4:43).

The Mishor became the inheritance of the tribe of Reuben. [See map 40.] Yet because the Mishor was geographically intermediate to the core holdings of both Israel and Moab, the struggle to control it began as early as the period of the Judges (Judg. 3:12–30, implicit), continuing into the time of the united monarchy (1 Sam. 14:47; 2 Sam. 8:2, 12), and into the days of Ahab and Moabite king Mesha. But in the thinking of the prophets, Israel’s control of the Mishor area had been relinquished to the Moabites (Isa. 15:1–9; 16:8–9; Jer. 48:1–5, 21–25, 34–36, 45–47; Ezek. 25:8–11). It is probable that this political ebb and flow may help explain why Reubenites seem to have been unable to play a considerable role in Israel’s later history, despite being the descendants of Jacob’s firstborn (Gen. 29:32; 49:3–4).

MOAB/PEREA

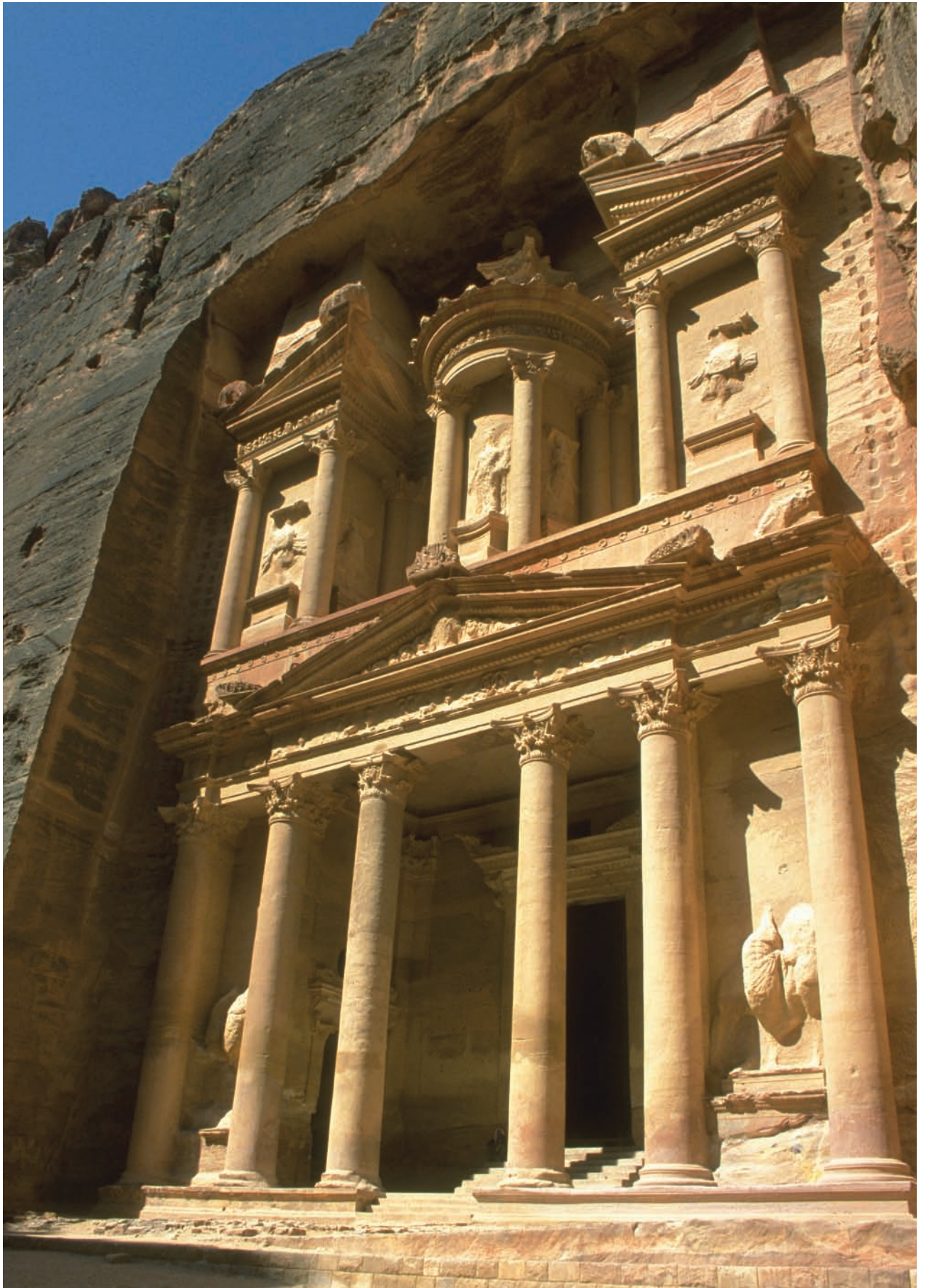
The higher plateau extending south from the Arnon as far as the Zered brook represented the nucleus of Moabite territory, with its capital city at Kir-hareseth (2 Kings 3:25; Isa. 16:7; cf. Num. 22:36; Isa. 15:1 [Kir of Moab means “town of Moab”]). During the New Testament era, the district of Perea⁷² occupied the western portion of what had been the Mishor and Moab.

The historian Josephus wrote that the district of Perea extended north as far as the city of Pella and south as far as Machaerus (a fortress city overlooking the Dead Sea, where Herod Antipas is reported to have beheaded John the Baptist). Moreover, Josephus reports, Perea extended from the Jordan River as far east as Philadelphia. Finally, he stated that the capital city of Perea was at Gadara (T. Gadur, not to be confused with the Decapolis Gadara [Umm Qeis]).⁷³ Josephus’s northern and eastern boundaries are puzzling, inasmuch as both Pella and Philadelphia were part of the Decapolis region. Perhaps his description should be construed to mean that the frontiers of the Pellan and Philadelphian city-states bordered on Perea. In any event, biblical geographers reasonably follow natural topographic and archaeological criteria, setting the eastern border essentially at a north-south line that runs from the upper Arnon as far north as the vicinity of J. Munif. From there it appears the northern border followed the downstream contours of the W. Yabis, which empties into the Jordan opposite the site of Aenon.

EDOM

The final Transjordanian district to be enumerated is Edom, sometimes known as Seir (Gen. 32:3; Num. 24:18; Judg. 5:4; Isa. 21:11) or Mt. Seir (Gen. 14:6; Deut. 1:2; 2:5). Edom designates the land and kingdom perched atop the long, slender ridge of lofty mountains that extend southward from the Zered brook most of the way to the Gulf of Aqaba. Edom’s





heartland, however, stretched southward from the Zered about 70 miles to a plateau that overlooks the W. Hasma, part of a massive sand-covered dissection in the earth that extended in a southeastward direction and represented the gateway to southern Arabia. [See maps 25 and 63.] Most of the heights of Edom rise in excess of 4,000 feet above sea level, and for more than half its distance longitudinally the elevated terrain sustains a height above 5,000 feet. What is more, this forbidding landscape was plainly circumscribed on the west by the Arabah and on the east by the lowlands of the Eastern Desert. The result is that Edom itself was only 10 to 15 miles on an east-west axis, riding the elevated ridge with a series of fortresses and towns that basically aligned the King's Highway.

The combination of natural and man-made fortification rendered Edom an impenetrable barrier to lateral traffic. About 25 miles south of the Zered, a fault line has created a canyon that fans eastward from the Arabah some eight or nine miles. At the foot of this remarkable wadi lies the site of ancient Punon, an important center for copper mining and where, according to the Bible (Num. 33:42), the Israelites encamped en route from Kadesh-barnea to the plains of Moab. Moses requested that the king of Edom permit Israel passage through Edomite territory to the King's Highway (Num. 20:14–21). But the king refused, thereby requiring the Israelite entourage to journey about 100 additional miles over arid terrain and through torrid heat, just to skirt Edom (Deut. 2:1–8). This psychological defeat was surely related to the “fiery serpent” incident (Num. 21:4–9; 33:42–49), in which Moses was obliged to lift up a copper serpent in this wilderness. One can appreciate from the geographical context why the Edomite king's refusal would have gone unchallenged, even though the Edomites are unlikely to have outnumbered the Israelites.

The gigantic cliffs and steep gorges of Edom, even from the more gentle slopes of Punon's pass, represented an inaccessible objective that, at Edomite whim, would continue to exist in splendid isolation (Obad. 3).

Situated adjacent to the western Edomite mountains about 20 miles south of Punon is a cavity-like canyon containing the impressive remains of Petra, the fabulous capital of the Nabatean kingdom, later occupied by the Romans.⁷⁴ Though obscurity surrounds their ancestral roots, the Nabateans came to occupy Edom in the third century B.C., and by the first century B.C. their influence was felt from Damascus to Gaza, and into the interior of Arabia. Much of their power was due to the control they exerted over part of a lucrative trade network extending at that time from the Saudi Arabian interior to the western Mediterranean. The site of Petra was approached through a slender one-mile corridor, flanked on either side by high perpendicular cliffs that almost touch at a few places. The basin housing the actual city was surrounded by colorful sandstone cliffs that held carved structures and tombs of what in antiquity was a city laden with great wealth.

Continuing south from Edom's heartland for about 40 miles, from the W. Hasma down to the W. Yutm, near the Gulf of Aqaba, lies an extremely narrow wedge of impassable granite mountains. These mountains of Midian rise to heights approaching 5,800 feet above the sea. In this region, archaeological remains reveal a culture completely distinct from its Palestinian counterpart and is sometimes described as Midianite. It is in this “Midianite culture” that some scholars believe Moses may have found asylum when he fled from the pharaoh and there served his father-in-law, a priest of Midian (Ex. 2:15–17; 3:1).

Façade of el-Khazneh (“the Treasury”),
a magnificent 1st-century A.D. tomb
carved into the rose-red sandstone of
Petra, measures some 130 feet high and
95 feet wide. Corinthian columns in the
lower level each stand 50 feet high.